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TINY COMPO: Who is the gaming legend behind Black & White 2?

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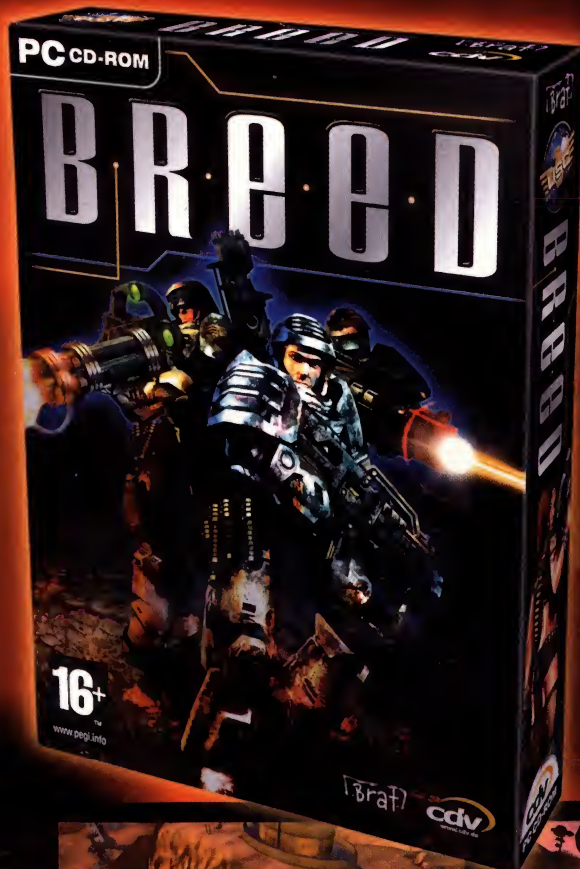
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Mad World

How times change. Back in the early '80s, the media ran roughshod over the government and effectively pushed through the Video Recordings Act 1984, banning a number of so-called video-nasties from the

shelves of your local video shop. Apparently, if you watched any of these films, your entire moral make-up would change in an instance and you'd be inclined to pick up an axe and stove someone's head in.

Banning the videos was one of those decisions made in haste, and then quietly undone when everyone had forgotten it. Which is exactly what happened. Go down to your local video shop today and you'll find almost every one of those notoriously banned films freely available to anyone over the age of 18.

Thankfully, the same liberal attitude has filtered down to gaming as well, courtesy of a voluntary rating system and the BBFC. A few years back, the same red tops that got the video-nasties pulled tried to do the same with harmless games like *Grand Theft Auto*. Luckily, the claim that *GTA* and its cartoonish 2D violence could push someone over the edge was seen as completely laughable. And let's be honest, if we lived in a society where something like that made people want to maim and mutilate in real life, then we might as well give up all hope right away.

I'm not discrediting debate on the subject and I'm certainly not sitting here advocating that children should be allowed access to violent and/or sexual content. Instead, I'm saying that proper certification and regulation is a more civilised approach than outright banning. For a start, it allows for a distinction between intelligent adult content (like *GTA: Vice City*) and thoroughly wrong and dangerous material (like *Ethnic Cleansing*, a game that's as thick and sick as it sounds and illegal in this country). You can find both of these in our exhaustive round-up of The 50 Most Controversial Games Ever, a massive 11-page exposé of the games that have caused tea to be spat from the mouths of Middle Englishers everywhere. And to think, if Mary Whitehouse had got her way back in the day, most, if not all of these games would have been banned as sick filth. As someone miserable said recently, it's a mad world...

Dave Woods
Editor



BLACK & WHITE 2 P42

A massive world exclusive look at the game which could re-write the rulebook for strategy gaming forever

COVER DISCS P134 →

■ SIX EXCLUSIVE DEMOS...

Far Cry, *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*, *X2: The Threat*, *Conan* and two full online games – *Time Of Defiance* and *BiosFear*.

Plus this month's Free Play game *GeneRally* (see page 15), and our 'Game That Changed The World', *Thief: The Dark Project* (page 138).

■ DVD EXCLUSIVE

FOUR demos exclusive to the DVD, including *Spellforce: The Order Of Dawn*, *Anito: Defend A Land Enraged*, *Live For Speed* and *WWII: Pacific Heroes*. Plus DVD footage of *kill.switch*, *UT2004*, *Doom 3* and *Battlefield Vietnam*.





FIRST LOOK

- 8 **SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII**
CODEMASTERS' STUNNING
NEW WARGAME REVEALED

BULLETIN

- 10 **HALF-LIFE 2**
LATEST NEWS ON VALVE'S EAGERLY-
AWAITED SUPER-SEQUEL
- 12 **SPECIAL REPORT**
HOW ARE IRAQI GAMERS ENJOYING
LIFE POST-SADDAM HUSSEIN?
- 14 **SIN II**
FIRST SCREENSHOTS FROM
RITUAL'S SHELVED SHOOTER
- 17 **EMULATION ZONE**
ATARI'S OFFICIAL RETRO GAMES
- 22 **WIN AN ALIENWARE PC!**
FANTASTIC ALIENWARE AND X2: THE
THREAT GOODIES UP FOR GRABS
- 24 **THE PC ZONE CHARTS**
ALL THE MOVERS AND SHAKERS
IN THE WORLD OF PC GAMES
- 26 **HOT SHOTS**
PAINKILLER AND FAR CRY



FEATURES

- 44 **THE 50 MOST
CONTROVERSIAL
GAMES EVER**
PC ZONE TRAWLS THE ARCHIVES TO
UNCOVER THE NAUGHTIEST, MOST
SCANDALOUS AND DOWNRIGHT
NASTY GAMES OF ALL TIME



BLACK & WHITE 2 42



GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS 48



THE 50 MOST CONTROVERSIAL GAMES EVER 30

ONLINE ZONE

- 94 **STAR WARS: BATTLEFRONT**
FIRST LOOK AT THE NEW CONTENDER
TO BATTLEFIELD 1942'S THRONE
- 98 **BALLERIUM**
PREVIEW OF THIS ONLINE
STRATEGY GAME
- 100 **FIGHT CLUB**
BACK WITH A VENGEANCE
- 102 **HORIZONS**
ATARI'S MMORPG REVIEWED IN FULL
- 104 **EVE ONLINE**
WE CHECK OUT THE
UPDATED SPACE SIM
- 107 **CORE COMBAT**
GOING UNDERGROUND
WITH PLANETSIDE
- 108 **MOD REVIEWS**
RIFTWAR AND FIREARMS V2.8
- 110 **GETTING STARTED IN...**
LOST DUNGEONS OF NORRATH
- 112 **COMMUNITY CHEST**
MAKING MORE OF
OPERATION FLASHPOINT
- 113 **NEVERQUEST**
STEVE HILL GETS A ROUND IN

HARDWARE

- 116 **HARDWARE NEWS**
ALL THE CHANGES COMING YOUR
WAY OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS
- 118 **REVIEWS**
NEW GAME MOUSE AND SPEEDPAD
FROM NOSTROMUS & A PROJECTOR
- 122 **DEAR WANDY**
TECHNICAL PROBLEMS?
DOCTOR WANDY HAS THE CURE
- 124 **WATCHDOG**
ROGUE TRADERS BEWARE,
WE'VE GOT YOUR NUMBER
- 126 **BUYER'S GUIDE**

REAR VIEW

- 128 **MAILBOX**
YOUR INSANE RAMBLINGS AIRED
- 130 **THE A-LIST**
YOUR ONE-STOP GAME GUIDE
- 134 **DISC PAGES**
- 138 **GAMES THAT CHANGED
THE WORLD**
THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT
- 145 **RETROZONE**
WE TRAVEL BACK IN TIME WITH
SCI-FI ADVENTURE CAPTAIN BLOOD

PCZONE

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ARMED AND DANGEROUS **62**



LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE **66**



CRAZY TAXI 3 **72**

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WIN! TINY COMPO Correctly answer this month's cover question and you could win some goodies. Send your entry on a postcard addressed to: Tiny Compo (139), PC ZONE, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ. The first correct entry plucked out of the hat wins a mystery prize. Closing date: March 3, 2004. The winner of our January Tiny Compo (137) is Mark Williams of Stevenage, who gets a copy of TOCA Race Driver for knowing that John Romero's ponytailed bonce appears on a spike in the secret ending of Doom 2. Big ups.

contents

PREVIEWS

- 42 BLACK & WHITE 2**
THE BATTLE OF GOOD VS EVIL HAS NEVER LOOKED SO GOOD! WE GO BEHIND THE SCENES WITH THE CREATORS OF A MASTERPIECE
- 48 GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS**
THE LONG-AWAITED SEQUEL TAKES BATTLE TACTICS TO THE NEXT LEVEL
- 52 KILL SWITCH**
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN IN NAMCO'S NEW ACTION-BLASTER
- 54 COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04**
THE WORLD'S GREATEST RALLY SERIES - NOW WITH MULTIPLAYER!
- 58 SACRED**
SEMI-CLAD FANTASY CHICKS GET IT ON IN THIS DIABLO-STYLE RPG

REVIEWS

- 62 ARMED AND DANGEROUS**
- 66 LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE**
- 70 IN MEMORIAM**
- 72 CRAZY TAXI 3**
- 75 NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK**
- 76 TRACKMANIA**
- 79 ANITO: DEFEND A LAND ENRAGED**
- 79 CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH**
- 80 HOT WHEELS - WORLD RACE**
- 80 BLADE AND SWORD**
- 81 VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA**
- 81 DEAD TO RIGHTS**
- 83 RE-RELEASES**
INCLUDING TOMB RAIDER: CHRONICLES, OFFROAD AND SEA DOGS
- 85 FEEDBACK**
YOUR VIEWS, REVIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE LATEST GAMES
- 86 REALITY CHECK**
WE COMPARE TENNIS GAMES TO THE REAL THING



**FIRST
Look!**

We can be heroes...

SOLDIERS: HEROES OF WWII

Exclusive! First screenshots and info from Best Way's stunning new WWII RTS

WAR REPORTER: Jamie Sefton

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

PUBLISHER Codemasters

DEVELOPER Best Way

EXPECTED RELEASE DATE Summer

WEBSITE www.codemasters.com/soldiers

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Incredibly detailed WWII RTS
- Enables you to directly control soldiers and vehicles
- Realistic physics and AI
- Open gameplay – no two missions replay the same



THERE'S nothing we like better here at **PC ZONE** than discovering an unknown gem of a game before anyone else has a sniff. *Soldiers: Heroes Of World War II* is such a title – an extremely impressive fully 3D strategy-shooter hybrid developed by Best Way, one of a new wave of Ukrainian companies currently creating a frontline of innovative PC games.

Snapped up by UK developer-publisher Codemasters, *Soldiers: Heroes of WWII* (previously *Out Front*) features more than

30 missions in various European locations. In it, you can play as German, Russian, American or British forces.

SHOOT TO KILL

"You could describe the game simplistically as 'Commandos without the frustration', but *Soldiers* offers so much more," says Carl Johnson, external development games designer at Codemasters. "You can complete your missions in different ways – you could decide to go in stealthily or guns-ablazing, taking direct mouse and keyboard control of troops and vehicles like a first-person shooter."

means that a well-aimed mortar can leave a gruesome mess on the battlefield.

You begin by assembling a crack team of individuals to complete missions that include objectives such as search and destroy, sabotage and assassination. One example is a mission where you have to kill a German officer, and this can be achieved by different tactics such as laying mines in the road to destroy his vehicle, capturing and using an enemy tank or by sniping from distance. The detail is such that you can even aim your shots at the car tyres, sending the vehicle off the road and throwing out those inside, leaving you able to repair it and drive off.

RUBBLE TROUBLE

Realism is also heightened by the physics system that can have air strikes blasting holes in buildings or reducing them to rubble, trees that sway in the explosions and unfortunate souls caught in the blasts and thrown against walls. Chain reactions can be set off too, so that an incendiary bomb can blow up a motorbike, which can set fire to a car, which will then explode with the debris, killing some nearby soldiers. The resulting detritus of battle – half-destroyed vehicles, burnt-out buildings – can also be used as dynamic cover by your troops or enemy AI.

Multiplayer is also being taken seriously, with a plethora of deathmatch and co-op modes over LANs and online. These use unique maps and scenarios such as Snipe Attack, where you have to hold out as long as possible. "We'll also be including a full level editor for single and multiplayer, because we want *Soldiers* to really take off with the gaming community," concludes Johnson. We'll bring you more details soon. [E]

"You could describe it as *Commandos* without the frustration, but *Soldiers* offers so much more"

CARL JOHNSON
EXTERNAL GAMES DESIGNER



The thing that hits you like a sniper's bullet when you see *Soldiers* in action is the incredible amount of period detail Best Way has crammed into the game. The development team has pored over dozens of dusty WWII tomes researching vehicles (over 100 including tanks, jeeps and torpedo boats), weapons, gadgets, buildings and uniforms. Animation is smooth and accurate, so troops move and fire realistically, reloading every weapon in the correct way. Plus, the physics modelling of their individual limbs



Call on air-strikes to devastate enemy positions.



An angry commuter takes his frustration out on Virgin Trains.



You can set up squad members to follow you, return fire & snipe from windows.



You can drive the tanks with the keyboard while firing independently using the mouse.

WORLD WAR

Options will be available for LAN and online multiplayer games for up to 16 players, with numerous co-op and deathmatch modes.

ARTIFICIAL AND INTELLIGENT

Enemies won't rush at you like robotic morons - they'll sneak about using available cover, as well as hunting in packs, commandeering vehicles, ambushing and flushing you out of hiding using grenades.

DIRECT CONTROL

Instead of just clicking on a character and telling him to fire, you can take direct control using your mouse to aim weapons. You can even pull off a headshot, as in any FPS.



PHYSICS LESSON

Soldier's sophisticated physics engine enables you to destroy buildings, vehicles and trees, set off explosive chain reactions and even shoot an enemy's helmet off.

TANKS A LOT

Tanks perform better when they're manned with a full team of four, but if you're short of troops, you can also raid them for handheld weapons including a lethal mounted machine gun.

LIGHT FANTASTIC

Real-time lighting means you can, for example, shoot out streetlights and use the darkness to sneak up on unsuspecting Nazi foes.

BULLETIN

BAD FOR THE STEALTH

■ ASSOCIATE EDITOR Jamie Sefton

▲ It's time to get something off my chest: I hate stealth. In *Deus Ex*, I would forget about the re-programming of enemy bots and just storm in with the heaviest weapons I could carry in my nano-augmented hands. For *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*, I would have poor Solid Snake breaking cover and bursting into a room full of vicious goons with only a paltry handgun as protection.

All of which explains why I'm giving thanks for *Painkiller* (p26) – a straightforward, action-packed, gory shooter with hilarious weapons and a physics system that can have a gaggle of zombies (or is that a moan of zombies?) splattering into the air with a well-aimed grenade. Forget your slow, monotonous sneaking-about behaviour – arm me with a stake-firing shotgun and BRING IT ON.

It's the same with last year's best FPS, *Call Of Duty* – although there are some levels with cautious long-distance sniping, you still end up having to scythe down Nazis with machine-gun fire. Groovy. OK, OK, I'm still looking forward to the new *Thief: Deadly Shadows* – I'm just hoping that Garrett will stumble upon a chain-gun and a shoulder-mounted rocket launcher this time.

In Bulletin this month, however, we have the latest *Half-Life 2* news, Ritual's shelved sequel *SiN II* (p14), screenshots from *Cold War Conflicts* (from the creators of *Sudden Strike* – p18) and a terrific *X2: The Threat* competition (p22) where you can win an Alienware gaming PC worth over £2,000!

Also, as well as our regulars Emulation Zone (page 17) and The Man Who Knows (page 18), check out the excellent special report on the gaming scene in Iraq (p12) – an article I'm sure Robert Kilroy-Silk would thoroughly enjoy...

VALVE UNDER PRESSURE

IT'S FULL STEAM AHEAD FOR *HALF-LIFE 2*, AS ILLEGAL COPIES OF THE HACKED SOURCE CODE GO ON SALE IN RUSSIA

Описание товара

Half-Life 2 (beta)

Дет. доступные в магазине

14.10.2003

296.87 руб. (6.85 \$)

Цена

Исключить

Разработчик: Valve Software

Издатель: VU Games

Локализация: 21 язык

Количество CD: 2

Язык: Русский и Английский

"Давно *Deus Ex* гораздо больше повлиял на индустрию, чем *Half-Life*" (Сайт Half-Life (Gabe Newell), основатель Valve Software)

Геймплей *Half-Life 2* длится уже пять лет, из них четыре – в обстановке полной секретности. Первые ролики попали лишь в этом году на E3. Разработчик сразу получил четыре награды, включая высшую, а в Интернете появились т. сайто, на которых можно было увидеть, что происходит за кулисами, и еще несколько сайтов фанатов. В то же время из сообщества и по сей день распространяется пачка скриншотов и комплект из умозрительных трейлеров, пока не видел ни игровое меню, ни даже пользовательский интерфейс. *Дуг Ломбарди (Doug Lombardi)* из Valve уверяет, что тайна Valve оправдана. Игроки ожидают большой сюрприз.

Тем не менее, говорить уже есть о чем. Да и релиз, намечавшийся на 30 сентября, плавно отодвигается к рождественским каникулам. Остается грустно гадать, как и систематизировать мегабайты интервью с разработчиками и гигабайты надежд, накопившихся за последние год.

Иногда они повторяются

Why not give your card details to an iffy Russian website?

IT'S LIKE A visit to the dentist – the longer you wait, the worse it gets. September 30 came and went, Christmas jingled by, and then mumbblings of an April launch. But what's this? *Half-Life 2* already on sale in Russia? To the airport, men, and don't spare the (Cossacks') horses.

Boxed copies of the second must-have *Half-Life* experience are apparently on sale in the land of big fur hats, with the picture (above, right) taken in Novosibirsk (capital of Siberia, apparently). The double-CD pack boasts the full game with translated dialogue – so it's no good to us, but is enough to warm the coldest Siberian heart.

IS IT PUKKA?

So is Valve running a trial retail run in some Russian corner shops to check the game's potential? Don't be silly. Valve's Doug Lombardi told PC ZONE that it's "the illegal packaging and redistribution of stolen source code", which has apparently been bastardised further by some vodka-fuelled, idiot Russian pirate and is on sale in disreputable stores and on dodgy websites.

Yes, the *Half-Life 2* saga rumbles further on, but if there's one positive note to add, it's news fresh from Valve of the imminent Software Development Kit (SDK) release. "A

legal hang-up has now been resolved and we'll be releasing version 1.1 of the SDK in the coming weeks," revealed engineer Rick Ellis. Releasing the Development Kit before the game, again shows Valve's ongoing commitment to the online community.

The SDK will ship with a number of resources, including a full character model with preset animation routines and a handful of furniture items. This means budding designers will have plenty of time to get to grips with the powerful Hammer and Faceposer programs in preparation for the big launch. Unfortunately, Source engine physics cannot be added to any creations until the full game is installed, but the Hammer program's WYSIWYG interface at least

helps visualise digital sculptures.

Other evidence that Valve could be gearing up for an imminent launch of *Half-Life 2* comes with news of an alliance with Limelight Networks – a digital broadband delivery outfit currently specialising in music distribution in the US.

Because Valve plans to launch the game both online via its Steam download system, and in the shops, it's essential the Steam servers can cope with demand. Valve founder Gabe Newell recently put the need for more bandwidth into perspective, saying: "With our current games generating more

Internet usage each month than Italy's total online traffic, we anticipate increased usage as we approach the release of *Half-Life 2*."

Some boast, but is this news enough to convince us the game is finally ready? Will we soon be ripping radiators from walls with the fantastic Manipulator gun? Roll on next issue, when we'll have more news and an exclusive interview with Valve.



Half-Life 2: bootleg beta copies are on sale in Russia.



"According to reports, boxed copies of the second must-have Half-Life experience are openly on sale in the land of big fur hats"

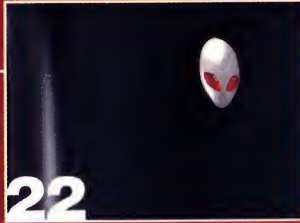
■ Publisher: VU Games
 ■ Developer: Valve
 ■ ETA: TBC
 ■ Website: www.valvesoftware.com



SPECIAL REPORT
Saddam RIP: let the games begin!



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Latest charts and release dates

PAST THE FINNISH LINE

FIRST SCREENSHOTS FROM BUGBEAR'S INNOVATIVE RACER *FLATOUT*



All the hits and collisions to the cars are calculated in real-time.

"WE'RE AIMING to be the *Half-Life 2* of racing games," says Aki Järvi, development director of Finnish company Bugbear about its new game *FlatOut*. Bugbear is no stranger to racing titles, having produced the excellent *Rally Trophy*, but the team is confident that this latest project will be revolutionary for the genre.

"The real difference to racing fans will be the cutting-edge realism of the interactive scenery," continues Järvi. "With real-time physics, we don't just want to make the tracks look pretty – our real ambition is to make the dynamic environments influence the gameplay too." This means that you could suddenly decide to crash into a pole supporting a roadside water tower during a race, damaging your car but leaving behind a nasty pile of debris for unsuspecting competitors.

Your goal in *FlatOut* is to build your career as the toughest underground driver around and begin the game with a fairly modest "piece of junk", as Järvi describes it. However, as you earn money in races and special gaming modes, including a destruction derby arena, you can tune your vehicle and eventually get the keys to the 15 more powerful muscle cars. All of which sounds good to us – we'll let you know more on the very promising *FlatOut* soon.

■ Publisher: Empire
■ Developer: Bugbear
■ ETA: September
■ Website: www.empireinteractive.co.uk

Brutal deluxe

MUTILATE AND MURDER FOR HIGHER RATINGS IN ROCKSTAR'S *MANHUNT*

MANHUNT, THE game that's got all of Middle England in a tizzy, has been slated for a PC release later this year. The latest offering from the Rockstar controversy conveyor belt, the game sets you up as a supposed mass-murderer on death row fighting for his life on a *Running Man*-style gameshow. You're forced by a demented snuff director to commit increasingly violent atrocities, and the more spectacularly nasty your hits are, the more points you score come the end of the mission.

Essentially a stealth game where you get to decapitate your pursuers with cheese-wire, the game has understandably ruffled the feathers of the great and the good (see feature, p30). As to whether it's any cop or not, you'll have to wait and see...

■ Publisher: Rockstar
■ Developer: Rockstar North
■ ETA: TBC
■ Website: www.rockstargames.com/manhunt/

Manhunt – future contender for a top 50 most controversial games feature?



BACK TO BAGHDAD

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

AS IRAQ STRUGGLES TO COPE WITH LIFE POST-SADDAM HUSSEIN, THE COUNTRY'S GAMERS CONTINUE TO INDULGE THEIR PASSION IN THEIR HOMES AND BAGHDAD'S INTERNET CAFES, REPORTS PAVEL BARTER

WAR IS JUST a game – played out on monitors and directed by puppet masters far removed from the action. The shock and awe of Baghdad's bombing in March 2003 looked to all intents and purposes like a scene from *Counter-Strike* or *Command & Conquer*. The difference being that amidst the relentless military campaign were regular people, exhausted from decades of conflict and Saddam Hussein's oppressive Baathist regime. Stuck between Iraq and a hard place, they huddled up and weathered the storm, finally getting back to some semblance of normality when US tanks rolled into the city and Comical Ali ran out of soundbites.

However, unless President Bush manages to pull a nuclear warhead from Saddam's bedraggled beard, the only weapons of mass destruction currently being uncovered in Iraq are on the PCs in Baghdad's cyber cafes. War might be over, but the game continues in the form of a pastime that has occupied the lives of Iraqis for as long as it has occupied ours.

"In a society that has very limited entertainment attractions for young people, gaming is one of the few innocent practices that escaped the scrutiny of Saddam's regime," says Zeyad Alshalchi, a 24-year-old dentist from Baghdad.

DESERT STORM

Prior to the collapse of the Baath party, the flow of information and entertainment into Iraq was heavily censored. Western movies, satellite television receivers, newspapers and books were all on



EA's *The Lord Of The Rings* franchise is a big hit in Iraq.

Saddam's blacklist – anyone found with them in their possession risked imprisonment and even torture. The country's three television stations, four radio channels and four daily newspapers were also tightly controlled by the state, yet gaming somehow slipped through the net to become a cultural phenomenon.

"Gaming has been popular since it was introduced to Iraq in the early '80s," continues Zeyad. "Back then, everyone owned either an Atari, a Sinclair, a Commodore or an MSX. Later, when the Amiga and Nintendo consoles reached Iraq, console cafes started to flourish in

Baghdad. It reached a peak when the PlayStation was launched in 1996. There were no restrictions on gaming, but a couple of titles were banned such as *Conflict: Desert Storm* and a *Red Alert* mod which featured Iraq."

During its last few years, the regime loosened its grip and Iraqis became connected, albeit marginally, to the rest of the world. In 2000, modems were legalised and with the introduction of the Internet, multi-party gaming exploded.

Rubayi Street, in the Zayuna district,



Sci's *Conflict: Desert Storm* franchise isn't too popular in Iraq.

became the hub of social gaming in Baghdad. Alongside restaurants, clothes shops and a bank, the street features a number of large cafes, each containing 10-20 PCs linked together with neighbouring cafes. An hour at a terminal costs 60p, with a total of 30 players playing a session at one time.

According to engineering teacher Sarmad Faraj, most of these cafes (sparsely decorated rooms, containing little more than PCs and plastic chairs) use high-spec computers and offer the latest single and multiplayer games such as *The Lord Of The Rings: The Return Of The King*, *Warcraft III*, *FIFA 2004*, *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*, and *Counter-Strike*.

CAFE CULTURE

Late night entertainment in Baghdad is about as commonplace as breakdancing in a convent, but one popular social trend has been for friends to take their PCs to someone's house and throw all-night LAN parties. However, as the country struggles to get back on its feet, electricity is scarce and home generators are reserved for priorities like refrigerators, TVs and heaters. For the time being at least, gaming's social function is conducted in Baghdad's cafes.

Nabil, a 16-year-old high school student from Baghdad enjoys wrestling, football and gaming – particularly war

The gaming cafes offer young Iraqis starved of entertainment hours of cheap, gaming fun.



Rubayi Street in the Zayuna district is popular with gamers.





Piracy is rife, but that's the least of Iraq's problems.



Computer Centre: "The Bab Alsharji district is the best place to buy large quantities [of games] in the city. Games, CDs and DVDs are sold at low prices – games are 50 cents (27p) and DVDs \$3 (£1.65)."

Ubisoft (publisher of *Splinter Cell*) dispenses its games throughout the Middle East via a Dubai-based company and is currently seeking a "reputable and reliable" sub-distributor in Iraq.

escapades like *Empire Earth* and *Medal Of Honor*. What about Zeyad?

"Well, it's hard to choose," he says. "The most enjoyable PC games I've played were the Sierra adventure games during the late '80s (*Police Quest*, *King's Quest*, *Leisure Suit Larry*). I abandoned PC gaming around 1994 and switched to the Sega MegaDrive and PlayStation – until *Unreal Tournament* was released on the PC and I haven't looked back since."

A few Western developers have used the rugged Iraqi landscape and the country's conflicts as a backdrop to tactical war games. But Iraqis are ambivalent about games like *Conflict: Desert Storm II* and *America's Army*, the latter developed by US forces.

Khalid Jarrar says that he doesn't "think it's right to let your kid jump up screaming excitedly because he defeated Iraq using the US military". Zeyad, on the other hand, would like to see a game about the last war, preferably a FPS with details that accurately resemble those of Iraq: "The first *Conflict: Desert Storm* was a disappointment."

MARKET FORCES

Western publishers have a long road ahead before they can monopolise on gaming's prevalence in a new Iraq, especially since the country has few laws protecting copyright. At 65 per cent, the Middle East has the second highest regional piracy rate in the world and Iraq remains a glittering paradise of dodgy goods.

According to Hafid Amin, manager of Baghdad's Shather

Because of security issues, cafes shut at 10pm.



WAR AND PEACE

WHAT GAMES ARE TOP OF THE PILE IN IRAQ?

The most popular titles in Baghdad's LAN cafes all feature the staples of military combat. Considering Iraq's bloody past (and present), doesn't playing war games seem a little peculiar? "No it doesn't feel strange – actually, it seems quite fitting to the circumstances," says Zeyad, who was born in Baghdad and raised in Colchester, Essex, before returning to Iraq's capital in 1987. "My generation has experienced all of the wars Iraq has gone through during the last three decades, so war and violent games have always been the most popular here."



C&C: RED ALERT 2

"The best game of all," says Khalid Jarrar, who adds that he would like more games "without guns and tanks, blood and fights". Just a thought.



COUNTER-STRIKE

One of the most popular games played in the cyber cafes of Iraq's capital, according to 16-year-old Nabli.



EMPIRE EARTH

One *Empire* replaces another? Sierra's real-time strategy is now the despot of Iraqi affection.



MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

WWII's Omaha Beach battle is re-enacted in the cafes of Baghdad on a daily basis.



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2003

As popular in Baghdad as it is in Birmingham, *UT2003* keeps the peace in post-war times.

government is formed, piracy will be low on the priority list in reconstructing Iraq."

POST-WAR GAMES

War in Iraq might be over, Saddam shackled in a US military bunker, but post-war

chaos and violence reigns in the capital city. Endless queues for petrol and regular electricity outages are combined with frequent attacks on allied troops and the presence of gun-toting Fedayeen on the streets. Gaming brings some form of escapism to the people, but because of the city's pitiful security situation, the cafes (once open 24 hours) now close at 10pm. "People start to go home early because they're afraid to stay in unnecessary places like cafes," says Sarmad Faraj.

While most forms of Western entertainment were restricted by the country's former dictator, gaming has helped keep people connected to a global stage. Although life continues to be difficult, Iraq's gamers are slowly but surely returning to the world. [E]

"The only weapons of mass destruction currently being uncovered in Iraq are on the PCs in Baghdad's cyber cafes"

Thanks to Zeyad Alsharji for his photos of Baghdad's LAN cafes.

BUG TROUBLE

FIRST SCREENS FROM STRANGELITE'S
FUTURISTIC SHOOTER *STARSHIP TROOPERS*



"Everyone fights. No-one quits."

CITIZENS! The first spectacular images are coming through from our brave Federation Mobile Infantry currently fighting the evil bug menace!

Developed by Strangelite in the UK, the sci-fi blaster *Starship Troopers* is based on the ultra-violent 1997 film directed by Paul Verhoeven. The game is set to feature hectic full-on battles with the various limb-chopping, plasma-firing alien insect vermin.

As you can see from these staged screenshots, *Starship Troopers* is utilising the latest graphics technology for maximum bug detail, and will be peppered with the movie's infamous ultra-violence and jet-black humour. We'll have a more detailed preview of *Starship Troopers* soon.

■ Publisher: Empire ■ Developer: Strangelite
■ ETA: Q4 2004 ■ Website: www.strangelite.co.uk



This is one insect you can't squash underfoot.



Starship Troopers is closely based on Paul Verhoeven's bloody sci-fi movie.

SiN Binned?

RITUAL UNVEILS WORK-IN-PROGRESS SCREENS FROM FPS SEQUEL *SiN II*

SPLASHED across this page are the first images from *SiN II*, the sequel to the violent FPS starring Colonel John Blade and his Hardcorp team of futuristic crime busters.

Developer Ritual (*Star Trek: Elite Force II*) has revealed that it's been working on *SiN II* using a sophisticated next-gen engine beyond *Quake III* and has even produced a demo to show to prospective publishers.

Unfortunately, little interest

has been shown so far and the project has been shelved.

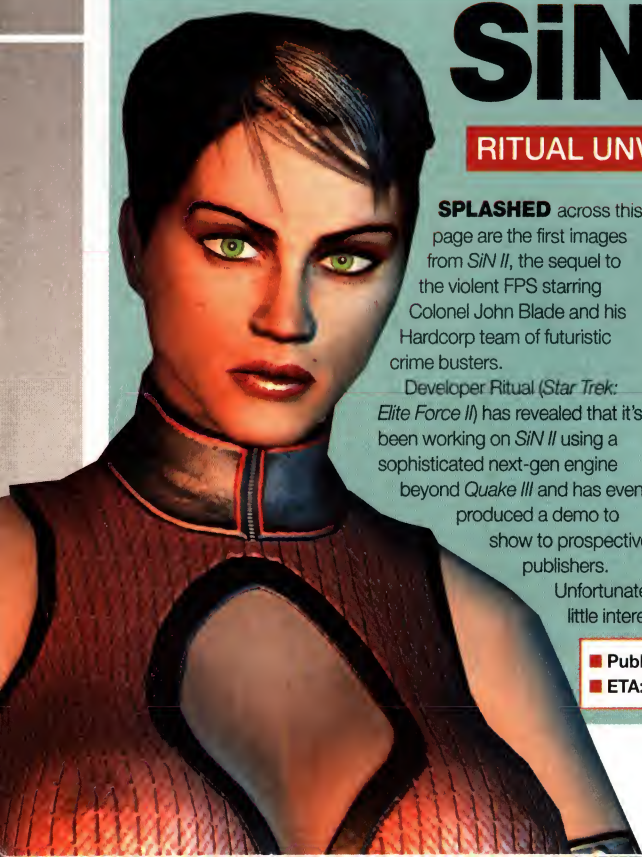
The *SiN II* images show hi-res close-ups of two characters, the new-look John Blade and a femme fatale known as Elexis Sinclair.

The original *SiN* (ha ha) was a barnstorming blaster – and although it had many gameplay innovations such as non-linear storylines and enemies on ropes that crashed unexpectedly through skylights, it was released at the same time as the scene-stealing *Half-Life* and sank quickly. We'll keep you posted on whether Ritual's latest FPS will be rescued from games limbo.

■ Publisher: TBA ■ Developer: Ritual
■ ETA: TBA ■ Website: www.ritualistic.com



John Blade – star of *SiN* and now *SiN II*.



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- 6 levels.
- Over 300 different views.
- Over 200 objects.
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- User-friendly "point and click" interface.
- Unique atmosphere enhanced by original soundtrack and sound effects.

"A beautifully rendered game that borrows from a classic novel concept."
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Micro
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EMULATION ZONE

BREAKING NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF EMULATION, WITH RETRO REANIMATOR STUART CAMPBELL

ATARI CLASSIC COLLECTION – IT'S OFFICIAL!

JUST FOR a little change, this month Emu Zone thought it'd be interesting to take a look at the 'legitimate' side of emulation, and particularly the changes that have been brought about in it as a result of the work of the unofficial emu community.

For many years now, emulation fans have been rightly dismissive of the games industry's attempts to commercialise emulation. For evidence, they cite anorexic retro packs with a tiny handful of ancient games being sold for full price, along with recreations which are substantially inferior to that available in the likes of MAME.

GOTTA WRITE A CLASSIC

Very recently, though, the industry has started to take these criticisms on board, with the release of rather more respectable efforts like *Midway Arcade Treasures*. This collects together 20 old coin-ops, largely from earlier retro

**A rarity: better than MAME.**

Remix Edition pack of VCS games, which includes various prototypes, alternate versions and oddities among its whopping roster of 75 titles, along with various other bells and whistles.

The latest and biggest commercial retro package is the clunkily-monikered

“The pressure of unofficial emulation is finally starting to bring about some decent official releases”

packs but also including previously-unpublished games like *Joust 2* (though sadly not the ultra-rare *Marble Madness 2*, an arcade Holy Grail which isn't emulated anywhere). There's also the impressive *Activision Anthology*:

Atari: The 80 Classic Games from The Artist Formerly Known As Infogrames. It's a curious compilation which gathers together 18 old Atari coin-ops (most of which have already been published four or five times in retro collections),

**Sadly, the controls don't animate.**

alongside 62 (presumably) titles from the VCS console. This marks the first time (as far as Emu Zone knows) that any of Atari's VCS titles have been available in

WHAT IS EMULATION?



By installing an emulator, you can run games that were programmed for different platforms – such as coin-ops – in their original form. The games come in the form of a ROM (Read Only Memory) that you load into the emulator to run. There are legal issues though, and unless you own the original game, it's often against the law to download a ROM. For that reason, we can't give you links to ROMs, though we can give you links to the emulators themselves.

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

OUTRUN (SPECTRUM 128/US GOLD, 1988)

The late '80s home computer and console versions of Sega's legendary seaside driving game *OutRun* played their part in one of the most infamous episodes in the history of gaming. Hyped beyond belief, the ports were uniformly dreadful and none was more heavily panned than the Spectrum version.

Probe's conversion was fraudulently advertised and covered before by games mags (most gave it tentatively decent reviews, before being buried in complaints by readers for their cowardice). It was, in short, a scabby affair – and one whose biggest crime was in slowing the game's speed to a crawl, and then further crippling it with a multiloop system which meant you spent more time rewinding and fast-forwarding to find the next stage than you did racing.

“So what's it doing as Emulation Of The Month?” you may be wondering. Well, the answer is that Speccy *OutRun* shows why emulation is so fantastic, enabling you to right all the original game's wrongs at a stroke and enjoy it to the full.

If you load the 128K TAP-file version of *OutRun* into top Speccy emu Spectaculator and set the emulator's clock speed to “2x real Spectrum”, you suddenly have a speedy Speccy *OutRun*. It loads new stages automatically and instantly, transforming the game from a lame duck into a fast, addictive challenge. Albeit one with strange-sounding music.

**It's still not much like 249kmh though...**

One of the greatest things about emulation is that as well as a nostalgia trip, it sometimes offers us a tantalising glimpse of an alternative past, and nowhere are those two factors blended more effectively than here.

LINKS

www.worldofspectrum.org

an official retro pack. It's a somewhat schizophrenic release – the arcade games are beautifully emulated, with a slick front-end, enhanced play modes and a variety of options for MAME-style backdrops and screen surrounds which add greatly to the experience.

NOT THE USUAL SUSPECTS

The VCS titles, on the other hand, have to suffer a bizarre and messy front-end which makes getting into the actual game quite a challenging task. What's more, by some kind of staggeringly inexplicable oversight (or more likely contractual wrangle), YOU DON'T GET *SPACE INVADERS* OR *PAC-MAN*. (But don't worry – *Math Grand Prix* and *Basic Programming* are both present and correct.) There's also a decent amount of bonus material in the form of trivia, high-resolution scans of historical memorabilia and half-an-hour of low-quality interview footage with *Pong* creator Nolan Bushnell.

It's taken the industry a long time, but the pressure of unofficial emulation is finally starting to bring about some decent official releases. Let's hope it continues for a while yet.

LINKS

www.atari.com

THE MAN WHO KNOWS

THE SACCHARINE utopia of *The Sims* has been thrown into turmoil by allegations of rampant **crime, mafia-controlled** neighbourhoods and **child prostitution**. These morally dubious activities are believed to be rife in **Alphaville**, the largest city in *The Sims Online*, which is descending into chaos as self-appointed governments fail to maintain order. The shocking claims have been made by **Peter Ludlow**, a philosophy lecturer at the **University Of Michigan**. Using the nom de guerre **Urizenus**, he was chief reporter on a newspaper called *The Alphaville Herald*, regularly interviewing **whores, pimps, sadomasochists, thieves and corrupt** government officials. Professor Ludlow whined: "*The Alphaville Herald* was not supposed to document dodgy things. It was done to document the emergence of economic, social and political structures in the game." However, when *Sims* developer **Maxis** and publisher **EA** became aware of Ludlow's investigations, all in-game mention of *The Alphaville Herald* was banned. It still exists as a separate website, but Ludlow claims to have been thrown out of the game and his accounts **closed down**. EA and Maxis say that they are aware of Professor Ludlow's comments, but that they are dealing with customer queries collectively and cannot talk about individual accounts. A spokesman said: "We will continue to monitor external issues as appropriate." In further *Sims Online* scandal, it has been discovered that a variety of foul and abusive language remains uncensored by the game's word filter. **Penis, gonad, and scrotum** are banned, but **dick, balls and nutsack** are allowed.

In other news, a computer consultant has launched a **£1.5m** legal action against **Rockstar North**, claiming it stole his idea for *Grand Theft Auto*. **Mark Gallagher** alleges that *GTA* bears a freak resemblance to *Crime Inc.*, developed between 1991 and 1993 and involving **gangs** taking part in **street crime**. In December 1993, Gallagher unsuccessfully applied for a job with *GTA* developer **DMA Design**, and showed it a copy of his game, which it (allegedly) kept hold of. Who says crime doesn't pay? Rumours that Gallagher is a **Haitian** have yet to be confirmed.

"Penis, gonad and scrotum are banned, but dick, balls and nutsack are allowed"



A little damage to the turtle's head.



"Gouranga dudes!" Or something...

TURTLE POWER

WHAT'S THAT PIZZA SMELL? IT'S *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES*

THE CRY of "destroy those meddling Turtles!" has made a bit of a recovery of late, what with the relaunch of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* making quite a splash up and down the country.

Given its new-found popularity, here – in the true spirit of commercialism – is your first look at the forthcoming console port of the Turtles' Shredder-bashing videogame adventures.

Essentially a revamped take on the old-skool side-scrolling beat 'em up, the cel-shading and quasi-3D environments are all very tasty. You'll be able to fight as whichever turtle takes your fancy, and each reptile ninja has his own moves and preferred weapons. And if you're lucky, old Splinter might be able to teach you a few extra moves down at the Turtle dojo as well.

Button-tapping and combos may be the order of the day, but if you have a lingering crush on April O'Neil or a soft spot for irradiated mutants, then it could well be worth a bash.

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami
ETA: April
Website: www.konami.com

STRIKE THREE

SUDDEN STRIKE TEAM RETURN WITH COLD WAR CONFLICTS



A scenario editor enables you to plan your war strategy.



Damn those commies.

SUDDEN STRIKE I and *II* were well-received, popular strategy games, so it's with a twinge of excitement (or is that indigestion?) that we can reveal the new title from the same development team. *Cold War Conflicts* features two major wars – the 1950s Korean War and the Arab/Israeli War of 1956, spread over four campaigns and 37 missions.

You can take command of armies from eight different countries (the UK, USA, Egypt, Syria, USSR, China, Israel and North Korea), each having 50 different land, sea and air units.

However, what sets *Cold War Conflicts* apart from other RTS games is the evolving non-linear system. This means that your ammunition and unit strength will change through the

campaign depending on how well you complete each mission. Already released in Germany to great reviews, you can read our verdict in next month's mag.

Publisher: GMX Media
Developer: Red Ice
ETA: April
Website: www.cwc-game.com

War on Terror

REVEALED! FIRST SHOTS OF ZOMBIE STUDIOS' *SHADOW OPS: RED MERCURY*

A NUCLEAR BOMB in a terrorist's backpack? This is the nightmare scenario that international Special Forces have to battle against in *Shadow Ops: Red Mercury*. Now being coded by Zombie Studios, this FPS has you fighting for the National Security Agency, as you and your AI-controlled buddies pursue enemies bent on selling Red Mercury – a deadly nuclear accelerant – to terrorist organisations.

Built on the rather good-looking Unreal engine, *Shadow Ops* will feature over 20 globetrotting levels ranging from Russia to the Philippines, in both indoor and

outdoor photo-realistic locations. You'll be able to unleash the power of 20 authentic military weapons against enemies, with body animations motion-captured using actual Special Forces members.

Multiplayer support for up to 16 players is promised, with various deathmatch, CTF and co-op modes to up the anti-terrorist fun and japes. We'll have more on *Special Ops: Red Mercury* before its summer release.

■ **Publisher:** Atari
■ **Developer:** Zombie Studios
■ **ETA:** Summer
■ **Website:** www.atari.com



Instant arcade-style squad-based action.



"Excuse me, can you tell me the way to the Hotel Exquisi... Aaaaah!"



"The Holodeck, but with a score... Brian Martel [vice president of Gearbox] always says that the Holodeck will be the last invention."

Randy Pitchford, president of Gearbox on his dream game. Now that would be worth the money for a Star Trek licence.

"When's your birthday Will?"

"February."

"What, this February?"

Disc editor Suzy doesn't seem to realise birthdays happen every year.

"While freedom of speech is protected by our constitution, we all know that that freedom does not protect yelling 'Fire!' in a crowded theatre. By the same token videogames with racist dialogue, including 'Kill all the Haitians!' should not be protected either."

Attorney Sanford Rubenstein at a New York protest by Haitians upset at their portrayal as gangsters and drug dealers in GTA: Vice City. And he didn't even mention their bad mullet hairstyles...

Search For
a Game

WANTED! Your PC Game Ideas!

DOOM 3? MAX PAYNE 2? THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?

"IT'S *GTA* meets *Vampire: The Masquerade*!"

"Think *Morrowind*... but in the animal kingdom!"

"A little bit *EverQuest*, a little bit *Tomb Raider*!"

Since we put out the plea, the entries have started to flood in. We're currently sifting through the initial entries, but we still want more. So if you've got the PC gaming pitch to end

all PC gaming pitches, then grab your pens and get creating!

We're looking for your game ideas – serious, off-beat or just plain stupid – summed up in a one-line pitch, like those above, and then expanded across no more than 300 words. Illustrations, diagrams and mocked-up screenshots are always welcome, but not a necessity.

We can't promise tons of moolah, rewarding careers at leading

development studios or a Ferrari in every garage, but we can promise you'll feature in a new section starting soon in *PC ZONE*, becoming the envy (or ridicule) of all your friends, along with a prize for any idea we feature.

Send your ideas to Search For A Game, *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

Good luck and remember – keep those dreams alive!

Sons of the Desert

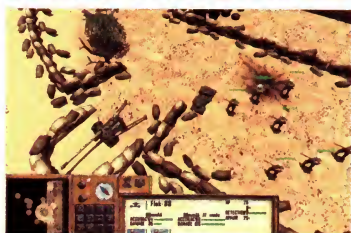
ROMMEL-ROUSING INFO AND SCREENSHOTS ON *DESERT RATS VS AFRIKA KORPS*

DIGITAL JESTERS has just acquired the rights to WWII RTS *Desert Rats Vs Afrika Korps*. Developed by Hungarian company Digital Reality (*Haegemonia*), the game takes place during the punishing North African desert campaigns of WWII, and features 20 narrative-based missions following two German and English friends forced to take different sides in the conflict.

Desert Rats offers you more than 70 detailed units to play with including scouts, flame-throwers, snipers and medics, along with seven categories of vehicles such as tanks and anti-air artillery. There's no faffing about with resource management – the only thing you have to worry about is the state of your troops: lose too many through poor tactics or the lack of decent medical facilities and you're stuffed.

Recent code showed a great deal of promise, with the strengths being the novel desert setting and excellent animation, although whether the scripted events will interrupt the strategy element too much remains to be seen. Review next month.

- **Publisher:** Digital Jesters
- **Developer:** Digital Reality
- **ETA:** April
- **Publisher:** www.digitalreality.hu



Desert Rats is a story-led RTS.



Butlins has gone downhill...

THE GAME WITH NO NAME

EXCLUSIVE! FIRST SCREENSHOTS FROM EMPIRE'S TOP SECRET RACER!

UK PUBLISHER Empire is already in Bulletin this month with one driving game entitled *FlatOut* (p11). However, **PC ZONE** has learned of another racer from them that is so under wraps, it hasn't even been named yet!

The secret game is being developed by Supersonic (previously behind the

excellent *Micro Machines 2* for Codemasters), which should give you an idea of the kind of manic shenanigans in store. You and up to three other friends can race stock cars, beach buggies and other vehicles across 15 varied courses in such settings as a post-apocalyptic wasteland and a lush forest.

You'll be able to take out opponents with mines, guided missiles, side-mounted shotguns and other weapons in LAN, online or split-screen multiplayer games. However, unlike *Micro Machines*, if you are knocked out of the race, you can still take part in the action by directing air-strikes at the surviving

competitors to spoil their fun. We'll hopefully have a bigger preview (and the name) of the game next issue.

- **Publisher:** Empire
- **Developer:** Supersonic
- **ETA:** June
- **Website:** www.supersonic-software.com



Supersonic's game is a hugely enjoyable *Micro Machines*-style racer.

"Bloody minicabs!"

Gone but not Forgotten...



...the last great air battle of WW2 is about to begin.

IL★2 Sturmovik - Forgotten Battles Missions and Campaign expansion



The action in Forgotten Battles is moving west with this brilliant campaign expansion for the ultimate combat sim. Created with help from the original Forgotten Battles developers, the excitement is incredible.

Every new mission is generated based on 61 mission types and thousands of potential targets for each of the 12 campaigns - that means you could fly any one of over three million unique missions!



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COMPETITION

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FIRST PRIZE: Alienware Space Black Fusion Red PC plus a copy of *X2: The Threat*.

RUNNERS-UP PRIZES: Ten copies of *X2: The Threat*.

Yowzer! This month we have the best competition giveaway ever for you lucky *PC ZONE* readers, thanks to the insanely generous bods at Deep Silver and Alienware. You – yes you sir at the back with the bushy eyebrows – could win a brand new, incredible Alienware Space Black Fusion Red PC with state-of-the-art GeForce graphics card, Creative soundcard and speakers, plus a smart 19-inch Mitsubishi monitor.

Not only that, but the first prize winner will also receive a copy of Deep Silver's magnificent space sim *X2: The Threat* to install on their recently acquired monster gaming machine. Scoring a massive 92 per cent and gaining Classic status in last month's mag, *X2: The Threat* is *Elite* for the 21st century with retina-melting visuals and

engrossing and intelligent space trading/shooting gameplay. Ten copies of *X2: The Threat* are also up for grabs as runners-up prizes.

Yes, yes... but what do you have to do to have a chance of winning this fantastic prize and make all your friends want to punch you in the face? Well, just answer the simple question below, stick it on a postcard and send it to *ZONE HQ*.

Deep Silver/Alienware competition
PC ZONE magazine
 Dennis Publishing
 9 Dallington Street
 London
 EC1V 0BQ

■ Terms and conditions: only entries with all the questions completed and received before the closing date will be entered into the prize draw. Winners will be notified by post. No cash alternative. Prizes not necessarily as shown. No correspondence will be entered into. The editor's decision is final. All the other usual competition rules, conditions and restrictions apply. And all that. Phew!

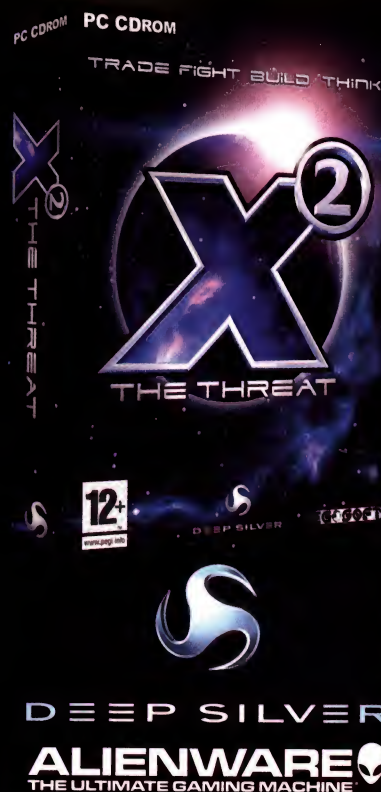
ALIENWARE PC SPECS

- Processor: AMD Athlon XP 3200+
- Memory: 1GB
- Graphics: GeForce FX 5950 Ultra
- Multimedia: Samsung CD/DVD Combo Drive
- Monitor Size: Mitsubishi 19-inch

Question:

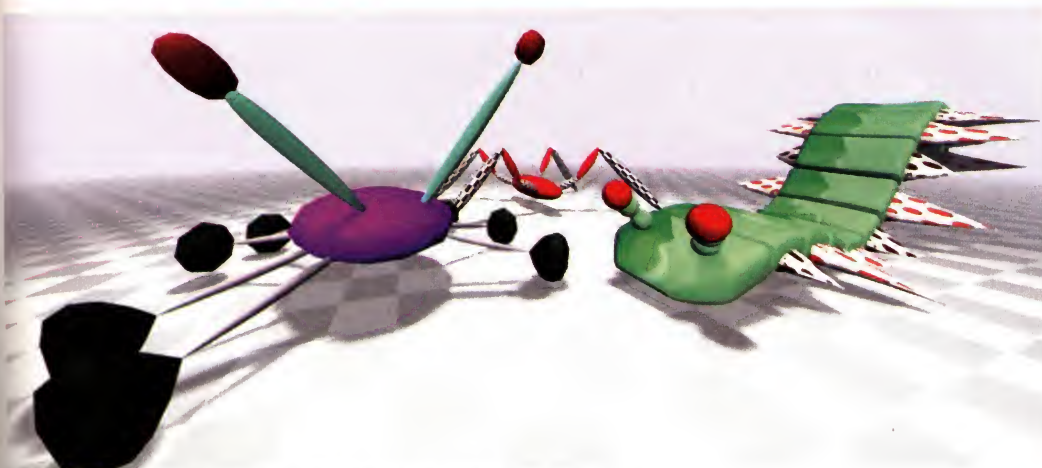
What is the name of the crap British spacecraft that recently failed to complete its mission on Mars?

- A: Rover 1
 B: Beagle 2
 C: Poodle 3



Creature Comforts

NEW BBC TV SERIES **BAMZOOKI** PIONEERS PC TECHNOLOGY



A trio of 'Zooks' await their fate on a new virtual reality BBC show.

THE BBC is aiming to use unique PC creature-creation software in a live studio setting to produce an innovative children's TV programme. *BAMZOOKI* features computer-generated creatures – or 'Zooks' – made by contestants, who then get to watch their autonomous virtual pets compete in various events including races and tests of strength.

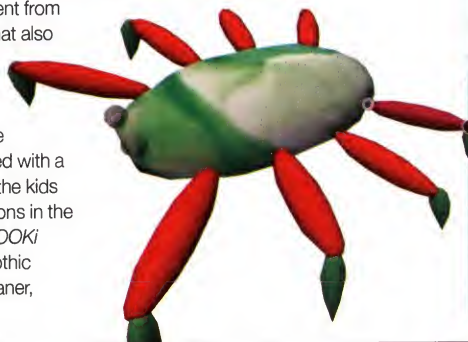
"*BAMZOOKI* will be engrossing and funny to watch because of the believable way the creatures move and react," says the show's producer Paul Tyler. "Think of Pixar's early desk lamp animations." The sophisticated PC toolkit for making the Zooks on any home PC has been developed by Gameware, a

company that has enjoyed success in the past with its Creature Labs games and projects.

But how do the programme's makers reckon *BAMZOOKI* will be different from the recent BBC flop *FightBox*, that also mixed computer graphics in a studio setting?

"Basically, because we're exploiting true 3D physics for the creatures' movements, combined with a visualisation system that allows the kids to actually see their virtual creations in the studio," continues Tyler. "*BAMZOOKI* will also be less of the clichéd gothic computer game stuff, with a cleaner, livelier, more colourful world."

BAMZOOKI will be broadcast on BBC1 and the CBBC channel from March onwards – we'll have the superb PC toolkit on our discs very soon.



Good Cop. Bad Cop.

GOOD COP

Our exclusive *Far Cry*, *X2* and *Prince Of Persia* playable demos. Get installing now!



The January sales. DVDs, games and music at piss-cheap prices.

Painkiller. This hilarious and atmospheric shooter just keeps getting better and better. Playable demo next month!

Compiling the Controversial Games feature (p30). Joey Deacon RIP.

BAD COP



Going back to work after New Year. Did we really get up this early before Christmas?

Sefton having to trudge an hour in the rain to the

local sorting office to fork out £1.20 non-paid postage on a letter to his flat, only to discover it wasn't his Kraftwerk gig tickets, but a pointless circular from unforgiving local estate agents David Philips. Nice.

The Hungarian national drink of Unicorn. A subtle blend of 20 herbs and spices resulting in Jamie 'BraveArt' Malcolm collapsing in Dave Woods' toilet for several hours.

Good Cop: **Carey Mahoney** (Steve Guttenberg)
Bad Cop: **Lieutenant Thaddeus Harris** (GW Bailey) (from *Police Academy* 1, 4, 5, 6 & 7) – suggested by Sam Mayers, Reading. Send in your ideas for next month's Good Cop, Bad Cop to win a PC ZONE goodie-bag!

Breath of Fresh Air

OXYGEN INTERACTIVE REVEALS ITS SPRING LINE-UP OF PC GAMES

TIPTOE gingerly between the mega releases of *Doom III* and *Black & White 2*, and you'll occasionally stumble upon little-known games from companies such as Oxygen Interactive, who has just unveiled its latest PC line-up.



Midnight Nowhere is a twisted point-and-click adventure (remember them?) that begins with your character waking up disorientated in a body bag, surrounded by corpses in a strange morgue. Using a mix of 3D characters against pre-rendered backdrops, the game prides itself on its sick

humour and gruesome deserted city setting. It should at least present adventure-gamers with something a bit darker than *The Secret Of Monkey Island*.

Paradise Cracked, on the other hand, is a cyberpunk-influenced turn-based strategy game along the lines of *X-COM*. Dark and Kafka-esque, its uncompromising central theme is the repression of the



Spells Of Gold: agrarian.

individual in a grim dystopian society. So no nob gags, then.

Next up is *Spells Of Gold*, which is best described as a land-based *Elite*-style trading game that uses a sophisticated financial model throughout its massive universe of varying worlds. Finally, there's *March! Offworld Recon*, a team-based first-person shooter where you battle against robotic adversaries. All titles will be released in March – and we'll have reviews soon...



Midnight Nowhere: sick.



Paradise Cracked: bleak.

■ **Publisher:** Oxygen Interactive
■ **Developer:** Saturn+ (*Midnight Nowhere*), MiSTland (*Paradise Cracked*), Jonquil Software (*Spells Of Gold*), HBM (*March! Offworld Recon*)
■ **ETA:** March
■ **Website:** www.oxygenint.com

CHARTS

In association with **VIRGIN MEGASTORES**

Your one-stop guide to game releases past, present and future. Whether a game is lost, looming or selling like sim-cakes, this is where you'll find it

ChartTrack

TOP 10

BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND!
100% SIMS-FREE!

The mighty *Sims* franchise should have taken up places two, three, four, six and eight of the chart. Quite frankly, we're getting a bit bored – and so are you – so for another month we're putting our fingers in our ears and pretending they don't exist.



Call Of Duty proves to be the blockbuster with the greatest New Year clinging power; beneath *The Sims*, and it's still holding its head up high while others slip down towards the abyss. Easily our favourite of last year's FPS crop, let's hope it'll be in the charts



TITLE

PUBLISHER

SCORE

1	-	CHAMP MAN: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS	90%
5	▲	CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION	94%
7	RE	EMPIRES: DAWN OF MODERN WORLD	ACTIVISION	83%
9	▲	TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA	48%
10	▲	MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR	93%
11	RE	HALO: COMBAT EVOLVED	MICROSOFT	84%
12	NEW	LORD OF THE RINGS: WOTR	VU GAMES	73%
13	NEW	KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC	ACTIVISION	94%
14	RE	JEDI KNIGHT – JEDI ACADEMY	ACTIVISION	89%
15	NEW	PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBISOFT	84%



Anything with hobbits gets wallets quivering these days and this Middle-earth RTS is no exception. The graphics ain't pretty but the game's solid enough – though if you're waiting for a more Peter Jackson-esque dazzler, hold on for *The Battle For Middle-earth*.



A Christmas climb and a New Year plunge means that *KOTOR* makes its **ZONE** chart debut at unlucky 13. This isn't on. It's up to you, dear reader, to right this tragic wrong, and move this superb RPG to the heights it deserves. Go forth and purchase!

YOUR SHOUT

Have your say at www.pczone.co.uk

What the bugging bollocks is *KOTOR* doing so far down???

Davetsutton

Good to see EA's stranglehold on the industry isn't complete, with *Total Club Manager* getting monkey-slapped by *Champ Manager* all over the place.

JoeyJoJoJnr

If you put *The Sims* back in, these charts make shocking reading. How can anyone think that not one, but three *Sims* games that've been out for years are better than *Call Of Duty*, the best FPS of 2003?

bagsabbis



TOP 10

1. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER: SEASON 03/04	EIDOS
2. MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE	ROCKSTAR
3. NEVERWINTER NIGHTS + UNDRENTIDE PACK	ATARI
4. HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2	GATHERING
5. FIFA FOOTBALL 2004	EA
6. CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
7. LORD OF THE RINGS: TROTK	EA
8. URU: AGES BEYOND MYST	UBISOFT
9. PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME	UBISOFT
10. TOTAL CLUB MANAGER 2004	EA

COMPETITION



Win the entire Virgin Top 10!

Once again, *PC ZONE* and Virgin have teamed up to give you the chance to win every game in the current Virgin Top 10 (see left, and try not to drool). All you have to do to enter is answer the following:

QUESTION: Which PC ZONE freelancer is notoriously addicted to taking Chester City to glory in Championship Manager?

Send your answers on a postcard to:

PC ZONE Chart Compo Issue 139, Dennis Publishing, 9 Dallington Street, London, EC1V 0BQ. Closing date: March 3, 2004

- Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, email address, job title and company name (and age if under 18).
- Please tell us if you do not wish to receive details of further special offers or new products from other companies.
- Please indicate whether you are a current subscriber to *PC ZONE*.

For general competition terms and conditions, turn to page 7.

INCOMING!

PC ZONE'S RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS. ALL APPROXIMATE MONTHLY DATES ARE CORRECT AT THE TIME OF GOING TO PRESS

FEBRUARY

ALPHA BLACK ZERO: INTREPID PROTOCOL	PLAYLOGIC
ARMED & DANGEROUS	ACTIVISION
CONAN	TDK MEDIACTIVE
CRAZY TAXI 3: HIGH ROLLER	EMPIRE
DELTA FORCE - BLACK HAWK DOWN: TEAM SABRE	NOVALOGIC
GANGLAND	WHIPTAIL
HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA	ATARI
KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE: INFERNAL CRUSADE	TDK MEDIACTIVE
LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE	EIDOS
LORDS OF THE REALM III	VU GAMES
SACRED	ASCARON
TOM CLANCY'S RAVEN SHIELD: ATHENA SWORD	UBISOFT
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	ATARI
X2: THE THREAT	DEEP SILVER

MARCH

BREED	CDV
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04	CODEMASTERS
DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR	EIDOS
DRAKE	VU GAMES
FAR CRY	UBISOFT
KILL SWITCH	LSP GAMES
PAINKILLER	DREAMCATCHER
POOL PARADISE	IGNITION
RICHARD BURNS RALLY	SCI
SÖLDNER - SECRET WARS	BIG BEN
SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW	UBISOFT

Q1

BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	EA
CODENAME: PANZERS	CDV
EASTSIDE HOCKEY MANAGER: FRANCHISE EDITION	SEGA
HITMAN: CONTRACTS	EIDOS
KNIGHTSHIFT	DEEP SILVER
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	EA
PERIMETER	CODEMASTERS
SONIC ADVENTURE DX DIRECTOR'S CUT	SEGA
THE SIMS 2	EA
RACE DRIVER 2: THE ULTIMATE RACING SIMULATOR	CODEMASTERS

Q2

GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS	VU GAMES
KNIGHTS OF HONOUR	SUNFLOWERS
THIEF 3	EIDOS
THE MOVIES	ACTIVISION
WARLORDS: BATTLECRY III	ENLIGHT

Q3

DAWN OF WAR	THQ
DRAGON EMPIRES	CODEMASTERS
DRIV3R	ATARI
EVERQUEST II	UBISOFT
JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING	NOVALOGIC
LORD OF THE RINGS: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH	EA
MEN OF VALOR: VIETNAM	VU GAMES
SAM & MAX: FREELANCE POLICE	ACTIVISION
STALKER: OBLIVION LOST	THQ
STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO	ACTIVISION
WARTIME COMMAND: BATTLE FOR EUROPE 1939-45	CODEMASTERS
WORLD OF WARCRAFT	VU GAMES

Q4

ADVENT RISING	VU GAMES
BLACK & WHITE 2	EA
BLOODRAYNE 2	VU GAMES
COSSACKS II: NAPOLEONIC WAR	CDV
EVIL GENIUS	VU GAMES
LEISURE SUIT LARRY: MAGNA CUM LAUDE	VU GAMES
THE MATRIX ONLINE	UBISOFT
MIDDLE-EARTH ONLINE	VU GAMES
ROME: TOTAL WAR	ACTIVISION
TRIBES: VENGEANCE	VU GAMES

2004

DOOM 3	ACTIVISION
DUNGEON SIEGE 2	MICROSOFT
HALF-LIFE 2	VU GAMES
SID MEIER'S PIRATES	ATARI
ULTIMA X: ODYSSEY	EA
VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE - BLOODLINES	ACTIVISION
WARHAMMER ONLINE	SEGA

MISSING IN ACTION

The war's not over until the last game comes home...

BREED

THE GAME that launched a thousand slips has slipped once more. With hype running at empty, what was once touted as a potential *Halo*-beater should be in our reviews section next month. Don't hold your breath, mind.

- Publisher: CDV
- Developer: Brat Designs
- ETA: March
- Website: www.breedgame.com



CS: CONDITION ZERO



ANOTHER eternal dance of slips and tumbles is the epic saga of *Counter-Strike: Condition Zero*. When it does finally see the light of day, this game will have five developing houses as parents. How confusing. It's back at 'preview' stage at the minute, but we'll do our best to get a review next month.

- Publisher: VU Games
- Developer: Reflections
- ETA: Summer
- Website: www.cs-conditionzero.com

SÖLDNER - SECRET WARS

BIT OF A mystery this one, as we were expecting preview code to play, but when it reached these shores evil space monkeys had rendered it unable to load. We expect to see a less dodgy build in the near future, but when exactly? Well, your guess is as good as ours.

- Publisher: Big Ben
- Developer: Wings Simulations
- ETA: TBA
- Website: www.bigbeninteractive.co.uk



US TOP 10

1. THE SIMS: MAKIN' MAGIC	EA
2. CALL OF DUTY	ACTIVISION
3. ZOO TYCOON: COMPLETE COLLECTION	MICROSOFT
4. THE SIMS: DOUBLE DELUXE	EA
5. MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT	MICROSOFT
6. THE SIMS: UNLEASHED	EA
7. AGE OF MYTHOLOGY	MICROSOFT
8. BACKYARD BASKETBALL 2004	ATARI
9. THE SIMS: SUPERSTAR	EA
10. FINDING NEMO	THQ



PAINKILLER

Paracetamol gets its comeuppance in the game where *Silent Hill* and *Serious Sam* collide...



SHOOTERS that put an emphasis on simple fun are rare these days, but *Painkiller* is set to make you giggle and will warp your mind at the same time.

Slightly disturbed by a handless, footless zombie trying to eat your face? Then ram a stake in its mouth and watch it get nailed to the pavement! Troubled by an old hag? Then shoot her 20ft into the air with your shotgun and watch her twist and twirl until she transmogrifies into five bemused carrion crows!

In the smorgasbord of gory screenshots lovingly spread over these two pages, you'll see evidence of *Painkiller*'s multiplayer capabilities, with one notable 'People Can Fly' mode in which

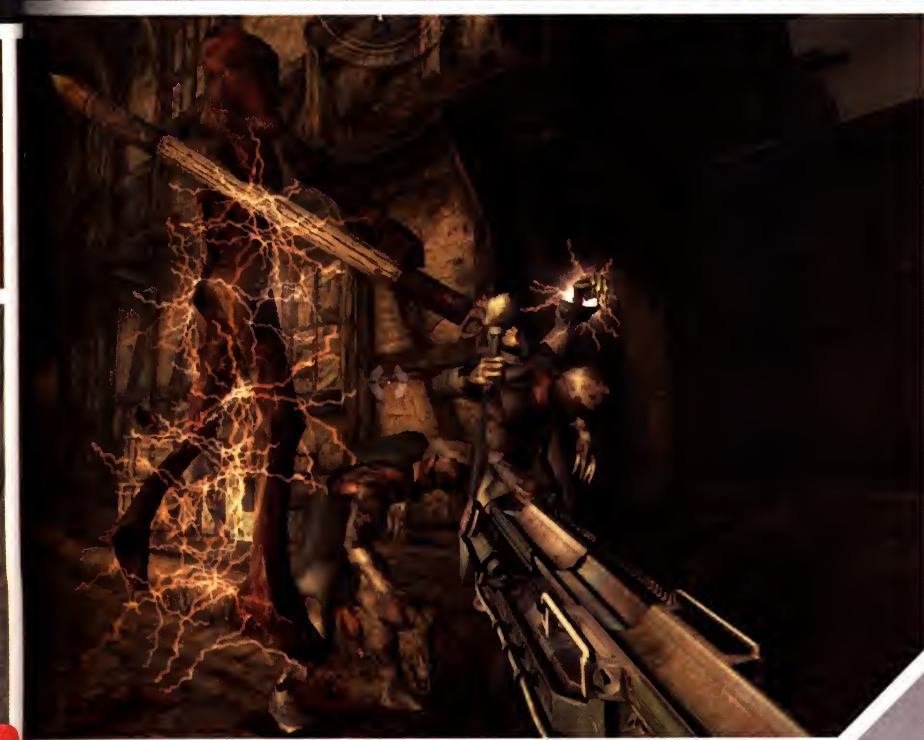
opponents can only be harmed when they've been tossed up into the air. Elsewhere, in the screenshot bottom-right, a crazy bleached effect takes over your screen after you've absorbed the souls of 100 monsters. Y'see, at this point you turn into some kind of demon with the ability to shatter the bodies of your fellow undead with a simple touch. For a while, at any rate.

We've fallen in love with *Painkiller*, and when you play the exclusive demo on our discs next month, we think you might too.

- Publisher: Dreamcatcher
- Developer: People Can Fly
- ETA: March
- Website: www.peoplecanfly.com

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FAR CRY

Stunning new screenshots from the game that's set to kick up a tropical storm...

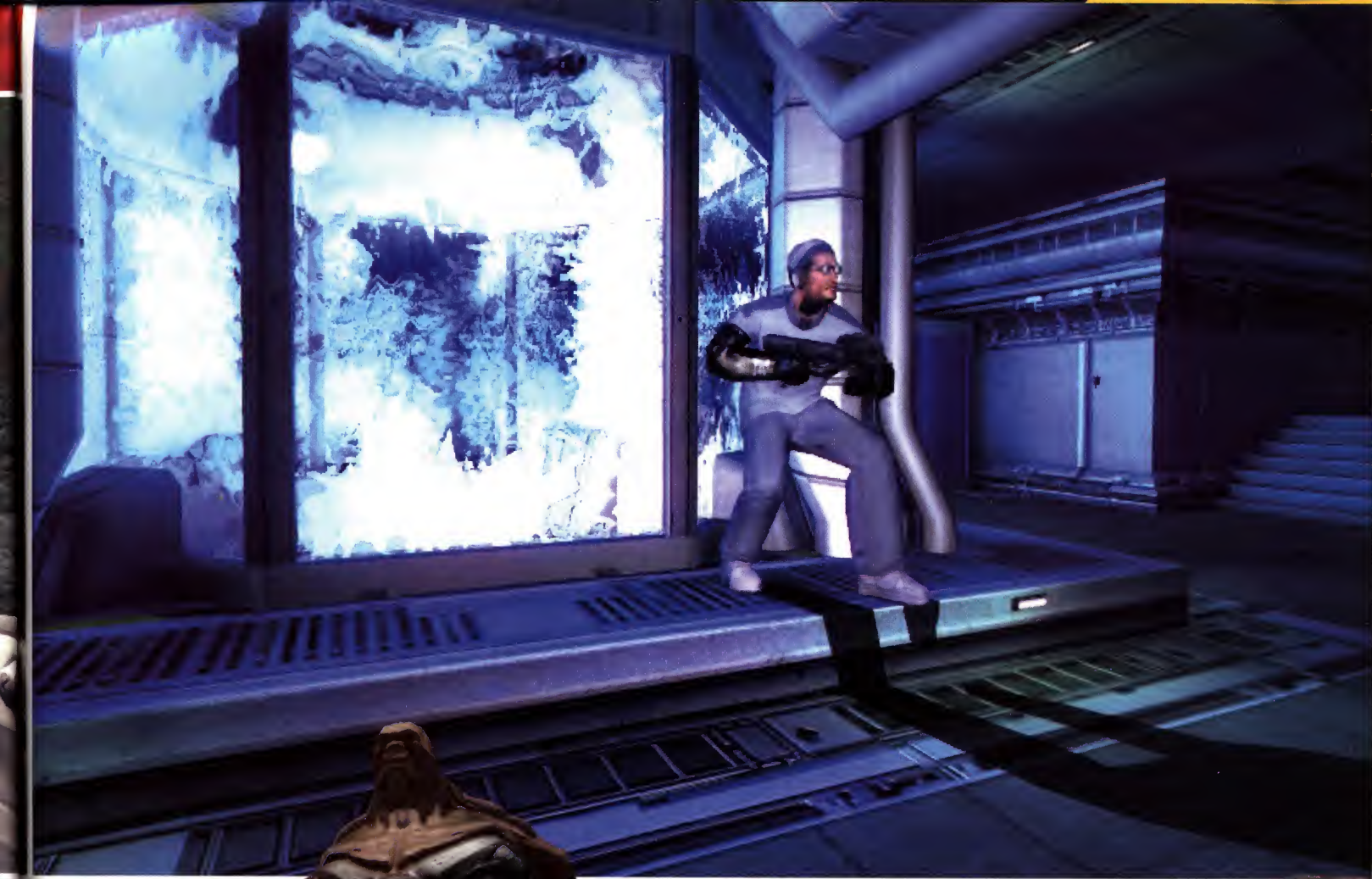


WE'RE MORE than a little excited about *Far Cry*. Despite not being saddled with a name that makes men weak at the knees, or a number that signifies a pedigree in the FPS world, we reckon this is going to be one of the biggest shooters of 2004.

On what basis are we making such a claim? For starters, take a look at the screenshots. When you've calmed yourself, install the exclusive single-player demo from this month's cover discs and gasp as the world comes to life and you realise that the screenshots aren't staged, and the game really does look that good. Then grit your teeth and try to complete it in one sitting.

We're pretty good at shooters (we say modestly), but *Far Cry* posed a serious challenge. More than half-decent AI mixed with a mission that involves running and swimming, driving boats and jeeps, blasting things out of the sky and sniping bad guys almost had us beat. Almost. Think hard. Very hard. And beautiful. And very cunning. If you need any more convincing, we should – if everything goes according to plan – have the finished game in time for a full review next issue.

- **Publisher:** Ubisoft
- **Developer:** Crytek
- **ETA:** March 26
- **Website:** www.farcry-thegame.com





THE 50 MOST CONTROVERSIAL GAMES EVER

Ban this sick filth! We've all been murdering imaginary people for years, but games are still being blamed for rotting our minds and flicking the psychopath switch in troubled youths. So are games really that bad? Your host *Will Porter* makes it his sole mission in life to find out...



50 RESIDENT EVIL CAPCOM • 1997 • PC

The furore over this creepy, cinematic horror adventure had more to do with the way it was advertised than its in-game zombie flesh-eating. Apparently, a bathtub full of blood with the words 'resident evil' beneath it was far too shocking and it became one of the top ten most-complained-about advertisements of 1996. Extra controversy points: Honduras banned the game in an attempt to curb its burgeoning street-crime problem. Did it work? Of course not. Although zombie levels have been significantly reduced.



49 BARBARIAN ENYX • 1988 • COMMODORE 64

This early fighter attracted controversy over its unique gimmick: gruesome enemy decapitation. The green undertaker who drags bodies away, kicking heads as if they're footballs didn't help matters either. Nor did the bikini-clad women used to promote the game. Guess it just went over everyone's heads. Get it? Ha ha... God, we're lonely.





47 LULA: THE SEXY EMPIRE

TAKE 2 • 1998 • PC

She's blonde, she's designed by randy Germans and her breasts are capable of delivering knock-out blows. In this game you and Lula (queen of the horny, lonely, and socially maladjusted) try to get to the top of the porn biz; starting off with cheap snaps of Lula's naughty bits and climaxing with porn movies, sex shops

and Lula's own sexy satellite in space. Sadly, it's about as erotic as Doncaster on a rainy day.



46 NARC

MIDWAY • 1988 • ARCADE

This non-stop gorefest outstripped even Mary Whitehouse's worst nightmares. You played as one of two helmeted

heroes, blowing the limbs off of dealers on your way to taking down Mr Big. Armed with a shotgun and a missile launcher, the game saw you wandering through the criminal underworld, picking up drugs, meeting drug dealers and then shooting them in the face.



45 BEAT 'EM & EAT 'EM MYSTIQUE

1982 • ATARI 2600

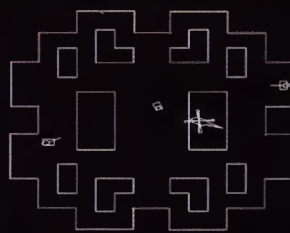
In Beat 'Em, victory depends on your definition of the word. You play the game by positioning wide-mouthed, nubile females in order to swallow the discharges of a masturbating madman scampering along the rooftop above. How these virtual ladies were persuaded into such a compromising situation is a matter of much debate. As is the unexplained risk of the bodily effluvium actually striking the pavement.



44 REQUIEM: AVENGING ANGEL

3DO • 1999 • PC

Get your smite on as Malachi, an angel armed to the wings with both conventional and divine turn-your-enemies-to-salt-style weaponry. Germany and Brazil banned the game, fearing hellfire and bloody damnation, but thankfully the apocalypse failed to materialise (perhaps waiting instead for the next Leisure Suit Larry game).



43 ARMOR ATTACK

LEIJAC • 1980 • ARCADE

At start-up, the game emits a series of unintelligible beeps – unless you know Morse code, in which case you'll hear "D-O-N-T-R-E-G-I-S-T-E-R," courtesy of

a programmer who didn't take kindly to the US draft registration requirement, revived in 1980. But who understands Morse code besides people in the military? Ah, the folly of wasted gestures. Fight against the system!



42 PANTY RAIDER: FROM HERE TO IMMATURITY

SIMON & SCHUSTER • 2000 • PC

You coax fit models to undress for photos using mints (ha! 'Cause models don't eat!) and credit cards (ha! 'Cause models like to shop!), in a bid to stop horny aliens from destroying the world. US advocacy group Dads and Daughters said this not only makes light of anorexia but also portrays men as sex-obsessed, a groundless yet surprisingly common misconception. We're just very friendly.



40 F**KQUEST

N/A • 1998 • PC

Moving, uplifting and quite brilliant, F**kquest has been sadly erased from the roll-call of point-n-click legends. A marvellous parody of Sierra's SpaceQuest adventures, playing F**kQuest was a powerfully erotic experience. An enchanting tale of a troubled man and his wayward penis putting aside their differences and looking for some slutty pixels to make love to, they truly don't make 'em like this anymore. Thank f**k.



39 ENDORFUN

TIME WARNER • 1995 • PC

"Play more, feel better" was this puzzler's slogan – and the press accused the game of brainwashing. Its subliminal messages, mixed with

she really wants it



BATTLECRUISER 3000AD PC CD ROM

GAME TEK

Must... Buy... Battlecruiser...

48 BATTLECRUISER 3000AD

INTERPLAY • 1996 • PC

How can a decidedly average space-shooter be considered controversial? Well, perhaps it's something to do with the fact that its ad campaign thought that the best way to promote the game's exciting space combat was to rely solely on a huge picture of Jo Guest decked out in leather, with the game box shielding her dainty front bottom from view. Rival mags were given a less dirty version (in which she wore knickers), but PC ZONE readers were thought broad-minded enough to cope with the pant-free filth that was emblazoned on our back cover.



In a few years, Hilda hoped to bat in the World Series...

41 HARVESTER MERIT STUDIOS • 1996 • PC

In this gratuitous slayfest, peppered with ethnic slurs, sexual perversions and homophobic inferences, you play Steve, an amnesiac who kills in grisly ways to become a member of The Lodge. What's really objectionable – and what has been excised from the British version – is a scene of three children cannibalising the thighs of their (still living) mother. Creepy, eh?



"Ohmygod! I left the oven on again!"

new-age music, were meant to give you positive affirmations. The powers that be normally ban subliminal messages in ads, but there ain't no law for videogames. We think subliminal messages are fine (without them we'd never eat popcorn), but the new-age music is a total outrage.

is not *the* Messiah (aka Jesus Christ). But, alas, this nappy-wearing cherub sent to rid Earth of unsavoury characters in unsavoury ways still upset the Christian right. How? By possessing prostitutes and forcing bad guys to kill themselves. I guess blasphemy, even of the tongue-in-cheek variety, makes people uptight.

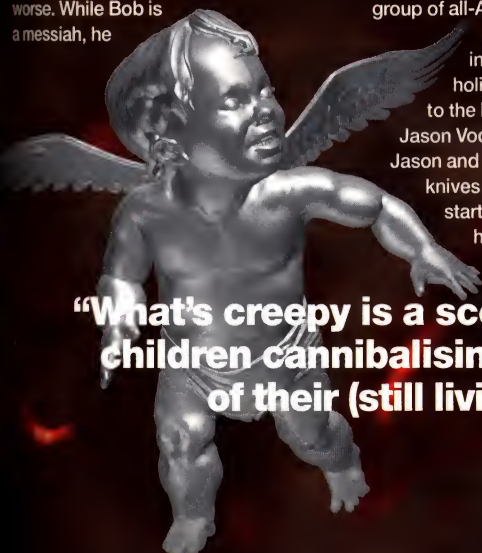


38 MESSIAH INTERPLAY • 2000 • PC

The name alone generated controversy before it hit shelves, and it just got worse. While Bob is a messiah, he

37 FRIDAY THE 13TH DOMARK • 1985 • COMMODORE 64

A game that saw you marshalling a group of all-American teenagers who had unwittingly checked into the eerie Crystal Lake holiday camp, worryingly close to the lair of hockey-masked freak Jason Voorhees. It's up to you to find Jason and kill him with a variety of knives and chainsaws before he starts hacking pieces off your high-school chums. Sounds like fun.



"What's creepy is a scene of three children cannibalising the thighs of their (still living) mother"

HARVESTER

Q&A

VINCE DESI



Will Porter wastes the time of the Running With Scissors head honcho Vince Desi while he hastily packs for a weekend piss-up with Gary Coleman and the *Postal* babes...

PCZ What's the most controversial thing you've put into your games?

VINCE I really don't think of our game as controversial – but if I had to choose, I'd probably have to say it's when you have to piss on yourself when you're on fire in order to survive.

PCZ Are the *Postal* games violent because that's what sells, or because you're all sick people?

VINCE *Postal* contains violent content in a very different way than other games or movies – we make it funny. How can you not laugh when you see a cat on the end of your machine gun? Some people think we're sick, but to be fair I'd say we're honest and saying what a lot of people really feel and enjoy.

PCZ What do you consider as 'going too far'?

VINCE That really depends on your audience. *Postal* itself is too far if you're a child, but there's no such thing when it comes to adult entertainment. I laugh when people call themselves a leading

edge or bleeding edge company: for us, there's no ledge to go out on. We see ourselves more as the edge itself and then you can decide.

PCZ How many complaints do you get? Any legal ones?

VINCE Over the years we've been very fortunate. We've had legal issues with our own government and we've been banned in over ten countries, but generally speaking I'm happy with our position. What's freedom if you can't live free?

PCZ What's the worst thing anyone's ever said about one of your games?

VINCE Who knows? We get all kinds of compliments and criticisms. If someone actually looks at and plays our game, then I have no problem with them or their opinion. It's when you get some professional asshole whose IQ is the size of his cock but his pen is mightier who then writes shit without ever even seeing the game. That makes me wanna piss on him after drinking a few pints.

To finish our interview, and because we're clever and worried for Vince's mental health, we threw some Rorschach inkblot tests at him to see what he made of them. Here's his take on the fluid shapes...



"A child drowned in oil."



"A thong in search of a body."



"A Christmas tree gone wrong."



"A shrunken head."



Diminutive US sitcom star Gary Coleman: undisputed star of *Postal 2*.



36 DEUS EX EIDOS • 2000 • PC

Due to technical issues (I call anything I don't understand "technical issues"; my girlfriend loves it when I call her that), this acclaimed role-playing shooter became eerily prophetic on September 11, 2001, because the World Trade Centre's twin towers had been left out of the New York City skyline. Stranger still: the explanation in the game claimed terrorists had destroyed the buildings.



35 VIDA: INTERACTIVE GIRLS INTERACTIVE GIRLS CLUB • 1993 • PC

Vida, a sexy ginger woman, was your prey in this decidedly improbable woo 'em up. A series of static photos gradually took you from a hotel bar to your place, where you discovered that not only was she turned on by being photographed in the nip, but she just loved sleeping with computer game

programmers. Hmm. Came packaged with a program in which Jo Guest encourages you to shave her unmentionables. Ahem.



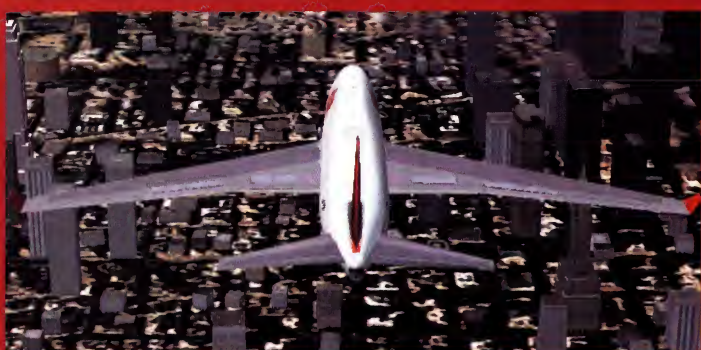
34 POKÉMON NINTENDO • 1997 • GAME BOY

Who knew that a character whose name sounds like a sneeze could become a religious pariah? In 2001, Saudi Arabia declared a fatwa banning Pikachu and pals because they "poison the minds of children", encourage gambling and are possibly Zionist. From that day on, Pikachu has been under armed guard at the expense of the British tax payer, the stupid yellow hippie that he is.



32 BERZERK ATARI • 1980 • ARCADE

Here it is: the first game to kill someone. Two people, in fact. In January 1981, 19-year-old Jeff Dailey died of a massive coronary after playing the hectic and increasingly challenging game. More



New York City - minus the Twin Towers.

33 MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2002 MICROSOFT • 2001 • PC

After September 11, 2001, rumours ran rampant in the media about this popular flight-simulation game. Some claimed terrorists could have trained on it because it's so realistic; others said the Florida school where two of the 9/11 hijackers were certified required 27 hours of time logged in with it. Rumours aside, this game still would have been controversial for Microsoft's self-propelled decision to remove the WTC Twin Towers from all future versions and offer a patch for old games. And people say Bill Gates doesn't have a heart. Our heart came bundled with Microsoft Office. It made the box all messy.



"Your face, your ass - what's the difference?"

28 DUKE NUKEM 3D GT INTERACTIVE • 1996 • PC

Featuring scantily clad strippers and excessive violence to extraterrestrials, this game got banned in Germany, but Brazil chucked it out for possibly motivating a São Paulo medical student's deadly shooting rampage in a cinema. And, of course, who could forget the classic "No one steals our chicks and lives" line? Post-feminist discourse at its best...

than a year later, in October 1982, 18-year-old Peter Burkowski keeled over after about 15 minutes on *Berzerk* (having made the high-score list twice), and was dead within 30 minutes having suffered a heart attack. The autopsy revealed scar tissue on Burkowski's heart which the coroner believed could have been from the prolonged stress of playing the game.



31 RIANA ROUGE EIDOS • 1997 • PC

Playboy Playmate Gillian Bonner played the sexually inexperienced and timid secretary Riana Rouge in this soft-focus adventure that centred on the realisation of her deepest fantasies: exploring alien worlds, having sensual encounters with men with dodgy tates and attempting to rescue her lesbianic love-interest. Surprisingly, these fantasies exactly matched those of spotty oiks in bedsits around the world.



30 HOOLIGANS: STORM OVER EUROPE HIP INTERACTIVE • 2002 • PC

Bad taste, bad game, bad bad bad. The FA took offence, stores wouldn't stock it

and its target audience wouldn't even be able to work out how to turn on a PC. Who knew a strategy game featuring fat skinheads drinking beer and clonking each other with chains would cause so much hassle? It's still better than watching Leeds play, mind...



29 GRAND THEFT AUTO TAKE 2 • 1997 • PC

Australia banned the top-down, two-dimensional original for encouraging lawlessness. Apparently, they found blowing up police cars and running down pedestrians to score points a bit unsettling. We figured, if anything, that *GTA* would speak to the Aussies' own cultural roots as a penal colony and serve as a sort of history lesson - in the same way *Donkey Kong* speaks to us.





27 COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

EA GAMES • 2003 • PC

You'd think a game pitting the US, China and terrorists against one another would please everyone. But the Chinese got their panties in a twist. A gamer summed up the furore in the *Sing Tao Daily*: "It's an insult to China for players to be able to bomb Tiananmen Square at the press of a button. The square's image cannot be sullied."



26 STATE OF EMERGENCY

2003 • PC

Too lazy to get involved in a political cause? You can still riot in this fighting adventure that depicts angry activists destroying a city in scenes not so subtly based on the 1999 World Trade Organisation riots in Seattle. Miifed that the game detracted from their message, peaceful WTO protesters solemnly vowed to shake their 'Free The Weed' signs extra firmly at the next hemp rally.



25 JOEY DEACON'S SPEEDWAY CHALLENGE

N/A • 1998 • PC

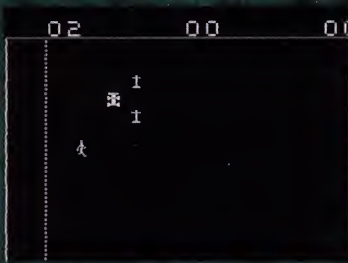
Rubbish, bad taste game that takes the mick out of Joey Deacon, a guy with learning difficulties who appeared on Blue Peter in 1981. Somewhat of a cultural icon, in that schoolchildren from all over the British Isles took his name and disability in vain, the game plays on the fact that he's got a wheelchair but he's in a speedway challenge. Not funny. We repeat: NOT funny. Well, OK, maybe a teeny-tiny bit.



24 SNIPER: PATH OF VENGEANCE

INTERACTIVE • 2002 • PC

What's in a name? Well, quite a lot it would seem. Timing its arrival to perfection, review code for this gaming clanger turned up a mere three days before the Beltway sniper started his rampage over in the US. Then again, it was just a poor FPS which no-one gave a toss about until the real killing started.



22 DEATH RACE

EXIDY • 1976 • ARCADE

Exidy toned down the original prototype of this vehicular homicide classic by



Less a game and more a mid-week Channel 5 movie.

23 PHANTASMAGORIA SERIES

SIERRA • 1995-96 • PC

Think *The Shining*! Think *Amityville Horror*! Think shitty FMV games of the mid-'90s! The original game was banned in Australia and pissed off womens' groups everywhere. The main female character in this adventure is raped by her husband, which apparently lets the player know his evil house has possessed him. Call us crazy, but wouldn't glowing eyes have done the job?

having you run down gremlins instead of humans. That still didn't stop it from becoming the first game ever targeted by parents and advocacy groups. The media called for a ban on violent games. Some of the more strident critics even made bomb threats against Exidy. Anti-violence campaigners with a sense of irony. Who knew?

"All liberals must be brutally slaughtered... tree-hugging, pinko scum"

JESUS FREAKIN'

YOU'VE GOT TO BE F***ING KIDDING!

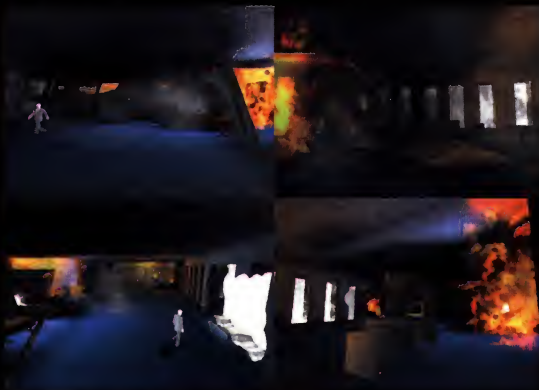
DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU READ ON THE INTERNET...

9-11 SURVIVOR

"HOW COULD THEY DO IT?"

"THIS JUST PROVES THAT GAMES ARE SICK AND WRONG!"

Just two of the comments we heard about forthcoming Unreal mod, *9-11 Survivor*, a 'game' which many went to town on, pouring wrath by the bucketload on something which turned out to be a hoax. A very sick hoax, but a hoax nonetheless. The developers said: "*9-11 Survivor* is a project that examines the role of media in our culture, and the influence that continuous, hyper-exposure has on our perception of the distinctions between reality and media mediation. This raises questions regarding how and why popular media forms, such as games and movies, deal with tragedy, conflict and violence." The twats.



Thank god this never really existed.

JESUS FREAKIN'

"AFTER 2000 YEARS, HE'S READY TO CAST THE FIRST STONE..."

A first-person shooter with Jesus as said first-person would, we think, raise hackles or laughter, depending on which side of the bible belt you sit. Sadly, *Jesus Freakin'* is another hoax, pitting fundamentalists, televangelists and republicans against Jews, Muslims, pagans, atheists, feminists, homosexuals and liberals. And the justification for the latter please, Jesus? "All liberals must be brutally slaughtered. I would have mentioned such a commandment in My Book if I could have imagined such vile, tree-hugging, new-age, pinko scum way back then." You can find more sublime/vile titbits by pointing your browser towards www.jesusfreakin.com



Stand and deliver... Gospel-style.



He won't need his face any more...

18 SOLDIER OF FORTUNE 1 & 2

ACTIVISION

2000/02 • PC

Officials in British Columbia, Canada, decided *SoF 1* was so violent, they banned its sale to minors. What with John Mullin's ability to shoot specific body parts, watch guts tumble out, blow off limbs, fill torsos with knives and hollow out enemy grunt's faces with his pistol, we kind of get where the naysayers were coming from... But you only shoot bad people, don't you?



16 CARMAGEDDON

SCI • 1997 • PC

Carmageddon's early tag line, 'As easy as killing babies with axes', drew this cousin of *Death Race* a fair amount of fire from watchdog groups. Then SCI had to force a redesign in which all the human soon-to-be-street-furniture were replaced with green-blooded zombies. The German version featured robots. Frankly, we're less inclined to kill robots than people. Unless they're all rusty. Then it's just humane.



15 KINGPIN: LIFE OF CRIME

INTERPLAY • 1999 • PC

The fuss around *Kingpin* had less to do with the shooter's violence level than the prevailing cultural climate at the time of its release – mere months after the Columbine shootings. The ads, featuring the slogan 'you're gonna die atop a bloody gunfight' didn't help. With a barrage of filthy language and the opportunity to beat women with lead piping, it's not surprising it got the pc brigade in a tizzy.



14 LEISURE SUIT LARRY IN THE LAND OF THE LOUNGE LIZARDS

SIERRA • 1987 • PC

Love it, hate it, commit self-abuse in its presence; Larry Laffer is an icon who just won't go away. Born of a text-based game called *Softporn*, the *LSL* series follows a balding, middle-aged dipshit trying to get laid by women with names like Jamie Lee Coitus.



21 AMERICA'S ARMY

US ARMY • 2002 • PC

A free online shooter?

Hardly controversial in itself, but behind the jollities stood the US army, who sank millions into the game as a recruiting tool. Games as propaganda? It certainly raised a few eyebrows, but we doubt that very few people were stupid enough to play the game and sign up – well, very few people outside the US anyway. Funnily enough, if you engage in a spot of friendly fire you're put straight into jail, without the chance to explain yourself. And we thought you got a medal...



20 SIMCOPTER

MAXIS • 1996 • PC

More than 75,000 copies of this game went out before Maxis noticed that a scene of a brass band had been substituted with rooftop scenes of gay men in bathing suits kissing at the end of one level. Jacques Servin, a gay programmer frustrated by the overabundance of curvy ladies in games (and, apparently, brass bands) added the

gay studs. Maxis canned him. We can only hope he sashayed with style on his way out.



19 HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN

EIDOS • 2002 • PC

For once, it wasn't violence that stirred the anger surrounding assassin action title *Hitman 2*. What pissed off the Sikh Coalition – and led to a recall of the original version – was the game level that was claimed to imitate 1984's Golden Temple massacre, in which thousands of Sikhs were slaughtered. Headlines, recriminations and much brow-beating soon followed.



17 CHILLER

EXIDY • 1986 • ARCADE

The videogame equivalent to the video-nasties of the '80s, this game scarred our tiny little minds. As far as first-person shooters go, *Chiller* doesn't take much coordination, since your victims are

chained up, naked and helpless – in dungeons full of torture devices such as racks, vices and guillotines. For a *Pac-Man* era game it's amazingly gory – and arguably more twisted than anything that followed in its footsteps.



Among its offending features: nudity, prostitutes, lewd jokes and obscene balloon animals. Despite the safe-sex lesson (Larry's pants blow up if he doesn't use condoms), it prompted California's so-called 'Leisure Suit Larry bill', trying to ban any computer software dealing with smoking, drinking, drugs, violence or sex. For evidence of the abject failure of this effort, see pages 1-148 of this magazine.



13 COUNTER-STRIKE

SIERRA • 1999 • PC
Much mayhem has been linked to *Counter-Strike*. It's been banned in Singapore, where violence in 'PC Bangs' (Internet cafes where gamers play through the night) is common. In 2001, a 21-year-old was sentenced to six years in jail for stabbing a 16-year-old boy who had just killed his character in the game. In January 2003, a 17-year-old was shot dead by an opponent in Vancouver, British Columbia. In Taiwan, *Counter-Strike* took the blame when a 22-year-old was

found dead, slumped over his keyboard after an all-night session in 2001. And two rival *Counter-Strike* gangs have prompted hundreds of police calls and led to a gunfight outside an LA cybercafe. Where will it all end? Metal detectors at LAN events? N00b taunts ending in ritual execution? The world we live in...



12 WOLFENSTEIN 3D

ID SOFTWARE • 1992 • PC
When your opening music is the official Nazi party anthem, you know you're asking for trouble. In the classic first-person German-basher, you play an imprisoned WWII Allied spy fighting your way out. Nazi saturation and a mecha-Hitler boss were considered to be in bad taste, especially in Deutschland, where the game was banned. To a lesser extent, the ability to stab dogs in the face was quite a novel one, although it was weird that these dogs were curiously restrained from chowing down on the hundreds of roast dinners scattered around the castle's floor.

FUTURE FILTH

FIVE GAMES HEADING YOUR WAY THAT ARE BOUND TO RATTLE THE DAILY MAIL'S CAGE...



LULA 3D (CDV)

Pneumatic love machine is about to enter the third dimension with 'bouncing boobs technology' and sexy outfits that include 'a cow-girl bikini, transparent fashions and the rubber slut look'. Are you as excited as we are? In her quest to find her three kidnapped porn starlets, we're assured that Lula will find herself in all sorts of sexy palaver and that she'll give every 'bad boy' exactly what he wants. What? Her to piss off back to Germany?



MANHUNT (ROCKSTAR)

Rockstar's grisly console stealth'n'slash is due for a port over to PC. Playing as a killer who's escaped death row, you're able to slit throats using a machete, suffocate your victims with plastic bags, stab out their eyes with shards of glass and, charmingly, cut off their heads with cheese-wire. Unsurprisingly, the quality tabloid(s) are up in arms about it and, to be honest, it's hard to think how much more controversial Rockstar could reasonably be. We're sure it'll manage it, mind.



AMERICA'S TEN MOST WANTED (SYSTEM 3)

If foreign policy is a go-go in the virtual hunt for arch-criminal Osama Bin Laden and a variety of other bad men. With commentary from US news anchors, real footage from CNN and, bizarrely enough, music and guest appearances from the So Solid Crew, the mixture is certainly intriguing - even if the term 'lowest common denominator' could well

describe its target audience. Will Bin Laden's head on a plate solve all society's ills? We'll just have to wait and see.



POSTAL 2: SHARE THE PAIN (RUNNING WITH SCISSORS)

An updated version of *Postal 2* with a bevy of multiplayer features, most notably one charmingly labelled as 'Snatch'. Essentially a CTF mode, this will enable you (perhaps playing as diminutive sitcom star Gary Coleman or a man in a gimpsuit) to grab large-breasted women from your opponent's base and get them to do a sexy dance with your own team's resident 'ho'. And if anyone thinks different, then you can throw scissors in their face.



PLAYBOY MANSION (UBISOFT)

Essentially an empire-building management game, this might not prove to be hugely controversial - but then again it's a fair bet that the lingerie quota will be quite high even if the nudity isn't. Finally, we'll all get to know what it's like to wear a dressing gown at all hours of the day and own enough porn to submerge a small island. Although, to be honest, some of our freelancers have been living like that for years...

"Finally, we'll all get to know what it's like to wear a dressing gown at all hours of the day and own enough porn to submerge a small island"

PLAYBOY MANSION



Stage one: urinate until subject is sick. Stage two: decapitate.



Stage three: immolate.

11 POSTAL 2

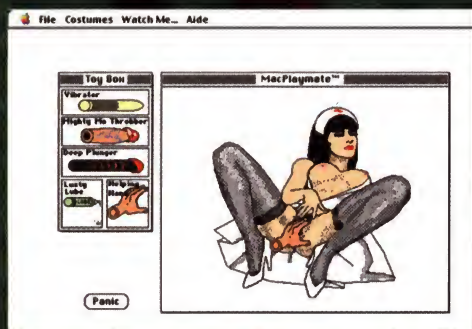
WHIPTAIL • 2003 • PC
Elevated far above the original *Postal* by a good slice of humour and a stab at free-form gameplay, *Postal 2* is still about the sickest game around. A moment that might encapsulate the ethos of the game is when you opt to piss on a woman until she's sick, cut off her head with a spade, pour petrol on her body and set her on fire, before putting out the flames with a never-ending supply of your own urine. As you might have guessed, it's not exactly high art.



10 NIGHT TRAP

SEGA • 1992 • SEGA CD

Banned and shouted at in Britain, this voyeuristic video thriller was what sparked the Yanks to start establishing ratings for games. Ostensibly, you play as part of an elite force "protecting" a sleepover party of young girls from vampires who want to suck their sweet little necks. Sega voluntarily pulled the game, only to re-release it two years later with a newly created M for 'Mature' rating. Objections raged against the use of helpless, scantily clad little girls while Japanese businessmen remained strangely silent.



9 MACPLAYMAT(E)

PEGASUS • 1987 • MAC

One of the first and most notorious examples of interactive pornography. (And no, shaking a grumble mag so it looks like the centrefold's moving doesn't count.) In this simple game, you disrobe Maxie and choose from six devices in a 'toy box' to pleasure her. You can also handcuff, gag and engage Maxie in lesbian sex. Local authorities asked for the game's removal from a MacWorld convention due to complaints, and *Playboy* sued Pegasus for copyright

"In this simple game, you can handcuff Maxie, gag her and engage her in lesbian sex"

MACPLAYMAT



A Japanese woman in her pants.

8 THREE SISTERS' STORY

JUST USA • 1999 • PC

One of any number of Japanese adventures featuring Hentai scenes (nubile, wide-eyed cartoon women having playful encounters) that could have joined the top 50. What shifts this one up a league, however, is that in order to complete the game you HAVE to torture and rape your female nemesis with a thick, heavy baton in order to be supplied with the relevant information. Not pleasant.

infringement, forcing Pegasus to drop the 'e' from the name. MacroMind, the company that unwittingly provided the animation technology for *MacPlaymat*, reached an agreement with creators that some of the game's profits go to the Chicago Abused Women Coalition. Which obviously makes everything just fine.



7 CUSTER'S REVENGE

MYSTIQUE • 1982 • ATARI 2600

Somewhere along the line, a designer at Mystique (a nasty, small-minded designer) got the idea to 'sex up' a little revisionist history with General Custer. Native-American and womens' groups railed against the game in which Custer, a cowboy wearing only his hat and boots, repeatedly forces himself upon a naked Native-American female tied to a stake. Critics did not have to wait long for a taste of retribution. In 1983, the collective videogame market crash put Mystique six feet under. We're guessing the company didn't die with its boots on.



6 ETHNIC CLEANSING

NATIONAL ALLIANCE • 2002 • PC

It's a relatively free world, so even right-wing bastard racists can make videogames. This first-person

shooter, in which you kill non-whites on urban streets and Jews on the subway, is used to recruit children for the white-supremacist National Alliance. Very stupid children, that is. Some highlights of this 'gem': African-Americans are drawn to resemble apes, and when they're killed, a monkey sound is played; Jewish characters shout "oy vey!" when they're murdered; and the Hispanic characters wear, what else, sombreros. The final playing level? Kill Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. To add insult to idiocy, the game was released on Martin Luther King Day in the US. To be honest, we'd feel a lot more comfortable shooting the programmers themselves.



5 POSTAL

RIPCORN • 1998 • PC

In *Postal*, you respond to everyday life with frenzied, senseless killing sprees. Targets include cops, marching bands, ostriches and scores of innocent pedestrians and minors. The inclusion of gays and ethnic minorities in the indiscriminate slaughter offended the pc police. The powers that be banned it over here, as did at least nine other countries including Australia, China and Germany. The lead character isn't actually a postal worker, he just snaps like one. The US Postal Service, proving it's as fractious as its stereotype, tried to sue the makers but failed. The game, however, is not only one of the shittiest ever created, but is genuinely, humourlessly nasty – as anyone who's heard the voices of their victims crying to be put out of their misery will testify.



4 THRILL KILL

N/A • 1998 • PSONE

When EA Games acquired Westwood Studios, it also got the unreleased *Thrill Kill*, a sadomasochistic-themed game filled with blood and skimpy outfits, along with more leather than your local dairy. Mega-corporation EA decided female dominatrices who orgasm when they kill didn't really fit its catalogue, which at that point did not include a single adult-orientated title. The bare bones of the game were reworked into *Wu Tang: Shaolin Style*, the distinctly non-kinky rap brawl simulator. Despite knowing the decision to pull the plug on *Thrill Kill* lost the company millions of dollars, CEO Lawrence Probst III claimed: "I don't regret it for a minute."



Fast cars, loose morals and looser women. Welcome to Vice City.



The face of a Haitian-hater.

3 GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY

ROCKSTAR • 2003 • PC

Art imitates Hugh Grant in this morally bereft and wildly fun free-roaming crimefest. Only here, calling on the services of hookers boosts your health instead of earning you humiliation in the tabloids. The residents of the real Liberty City, a section of Miami, took offence at the portrayal of their town as a rundown haven of scum

and crime. Meanwhile, as I type, a group of disgruntled Haitians are campaigning against it, angered that the game encourages you to kill members of their community. Apparently, they didn't notice that you also have to kill Cubans, Italians, African-Americans, gay people, straight people, rednecks, prostitutes, the police and every bugger

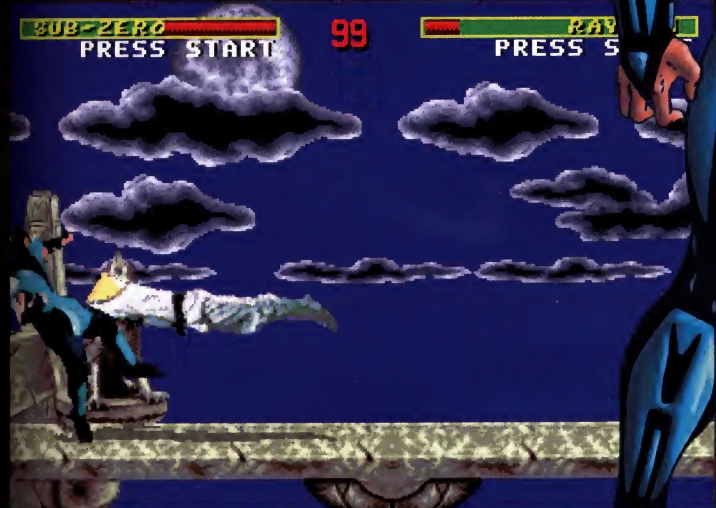
that moves. In August 2003, two Tennessee teenagers claimed it inspired them to snipe at vehicles on Interstate 40, killing one motorist and wounding another. The *New York Post*, meanwhile, has claimed that the game is "10,000 times worse than the worst thing anybody thinks Michael Jackson did to a little boy". Which you have to admit is doubtful.



Let's see: block, block, high punch, low kick. Block, block...



Scorpion shows off his new trainers.



Toastie! Uppercut! Impressive! Those were the days...

2 MORTAL KOMBAT

MIDWAY • 1992 • ARCADE

Everyone has something to say about this fighting classic and its offspring. So far, the series has grossed more than \$1.5 billion despite bans in Singapore, Germany and Brazil. The big deal? The 'fatality' moves you could use to finish your foes. In the original, Sub-Zero could rip the heads off of his victims leaving their spinal cords dangling in the breeze. Kano could tear still-beating hearts out of chests. One outraged mother sued Midway when her 13-year-old son was stabbed by a friend "addicted" to the game. In the suit she blamed Midway's "aggressive marketing tactics to adolescents" for the incident. Midway won the suit, paving the way for a slew (and by slew, we mean shitload) of sequels on consoles and in the arcades.

AND THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL GAME OF ALL TIME IS...



The granddaddy of the modern FPS sits in the dock.

1 DOOM

ID SOFTWARE • 1993 • PC

"It's going to be like f**king *Doom*. Tick, tick, tick. Haa! That f**king shotgun is straight out of *Doom*!" said Eric Harris, Columbine shooter, on a videotape that he and Dylan Klebold recorded

while planning the killings. *Doom*'s excessively violent descent into hell on Phobos resulted in its ban in Brazil and Germany, but it wasn't until it was linked to real-life violence that the US took notice. First, when Michael Carneal killed three girls at a Paducah, Kentucky high school in 1997 (a \$33 million lawsuit against companies including makers id Software was later dismissed). And then again in 1999 when Harris and Klebold, both avid gamers, killed 13 people at Columbine High School

in Littleton, Colorado, before killing themselves. The knee-jerk reaction to the violence of these horrible acts was deafening. After Paducah, experts appeared

on TV calling *Doom* – and *Quake*, its 3D progeny – "murder simulators", claiming that they desensitized children to blood and violence. Whether violent games are a direct cause for these atrocities or a signifier of something that lies slightly deeper within the perpetrators'

upbringings and surroundings is a debate that will never fade. One thing we've all learnt however, is that in any vital argument like this, you should always try your utmost to blame the scapegoat. It's far easier that way for everybody.

"After Paducah, experts appeared on TV saying *Doom* – and *Quake* – were murder simulators"

DOOM



Can id's masterpiece really turn us into killers?

FRIENDS

UNITE...



...OR
FRIENDS

COLLIDE



ON

XBOX
LIVE

2 MONTH
TRIAL
OFFER*

Xbox Live™ the ultimate broadband gaming experience where you can play friends as competitive as you are. Now, for a limited time only, buy one of 13 specially selected titles from our range of over 50 Live enabled games – and get a two month trial offer.*



XBOX
LIVE

it's good to play together

www.xbox.com/live

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Good god/bad god...

BLACK & WHITE 2

Martin Korda checks in on the game that's threatening to bring true freedom to the gaming masses

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Black & White Studios/Lionhead

PUBLISHER EA

WEBSITE www2.bwggame.com

ETA Christmas 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Stunning physics engine
- Freeform yet intuitive gameplay
- Game moulds itself to your playing style
- Improved creatures
- Jaw-dropping visuals
- Epic battles featuring thousands of troops

MATTHEW WIGGINS,

chief army programmer at Black & White Studios has his head buried in a book called *The Art Of Warfare On Land*, brow furrowed in a state of absolute concentration. He's been reading the text for months, painstakingly dissecting each page, every diagram of war and subtle battlefield formation, before attempting to translate them into game code.

His dedication to perfection and accuracy is an embodiment of the ethos at the studio, a 43-strong team working 12-hour days (16-hour on Tuesdays and Thursdays) – each an essential cog in this creative machine of game development. The collective aim is to produce one of the

most ambitious titles in history, god-game-come-RTS, *Black & White 2*.

Matthew's desk is our last port of call in an exclusive tour of studio and game, a journey led by gaming legend Peter Molyneux and studio head Jonty Barnes. During our stay, we visit every nuance, subtlety and groundbreaking idea within the studio's epic vision, in the process revealing a game of huge potential. If all of its ambitious visions are realised, *Black & White 2* could well change the face of strategy gaming forever.

A NEW BEGINNING

But back to now. Still far from finished, *B&W2*'s distinct parts are already melding into a potentially breathtaking whole of revolutionary physics, graphics and freeform gameplay. Mistakes were made with *Black & White* – the epitome of a flawed masterpiece – and Peter and Jonty, in their determination to right these flaws, are listening ceaselessly to the views and opinions of the *B&W* community. Their goal is to bring you a game with almost infinite choice and personalised gameplay, yet one with instant accessibility too. A tall order indeed, even for this pair.

B&W2's fabric, its very essence is based upon cause and effect, with every





CV

BLACK
& WHITE
Studios

BLACK & WHITE STUDIOS

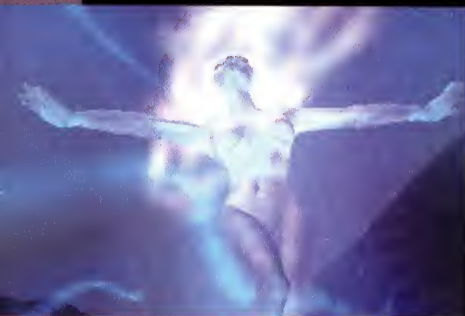
A subsidiary of Lionhead, Black & White Studios was set up by Peter Molyneux specifically to design the *Black & White* games, of which this is the second of a proposed five.

1999 *Black & White* Studios is set up.

2001 *Black & White* is released, receiving as much criticism as it does acclaim. We loved it, although admit it has its faults.

2002 *Black & White: Creature Isles* hits the shelves, replete with new quests and creatures.

“If all its visions are realised, *Black & White 2* could change strategy gaming forever”



For goodness sake, put some clothes on woman!

action creating a reaction. As Peter explained before we began our tour: "The core of *B&W2* is for the world to change to reflect what you're like, and to look after your people and creature. The game will mould itself to you, depending on how aggressive or peaceful you are." Even how you choose to treat your people will decide what kind of god you become and which paths you ultimately tread.

BLESSED ARE THE GREEKS

Your role is to play as the god of the Greeks, a people on the knife-edge of annihilation, forced to flee their homeland by the barbaric Aztecs who are led by power-hungry high priests intent on world domination. Cast out to sea with the remnants of your race, you embark on a voyage to 12 beautiful and diverse islands populated by the Norse, Japanese, Egyptians – and of course, the bastard Aztecs. Your reaction to this near-genocide will be completely up to you.

If you want, you'll be able to follow the path of 'good' and concentrate on building up a thriving metropolis. In doing so, you can have Helm's Deep-like defences, full of vast buildings and farms, and let the game and the enemy come to you. On the other hand, you can just go out and reap your revenge on the enemy by building huge armies and waging all-out war.

THE LAWS OF PHYSICS

But more on wars and battle tactics later, as our tour begins with a visit to the physics department. This is the one area that Peter Molyneux believes – more than any other – will shape the game and allow you to do things you've only ever dreamed of.



Build an army and wage war, or concentrate on defence and let the enemy come to you.



Creatures fighting within cities will be able to cause untold damage.

As with its predecessor, you'll control your on-screen actions via a giant omnipotent cursor-like hand, which you'll use to pick up and manipulate any object in the world and cast a devastating array of spells.

"Imagine the ability to pick up and start to build things with your hand. The

gameplay mechanics of that are almost infinite. Every object in *B&W2* has its own properties: that's every tree, branch, pebble and rock, everything. This new physics system doesn't just apply to objects interacting with each other correctly, it also applies to their interaction with heat, light and water," explains Peter enthusiastically as we sidle up next to

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

B&W2 COMPOSER CRAIG BEATTIE LENDS US HIS EAR

Ensnared in his soundproof studio, Craig is diligently composing hundreds of unique tracks to complement the ever-changing, free-form direction of the game. "We're going for a full-blown dynamically changing, orchestral score. I'm using five machines and a state-of-the-art sampled orchestra called *Orchestral Cube*," he explains. And with each piece containing over 100 separate tracks in need of mixing to orchestral standards, it's no easy job. Happily, it seems to be paying dividends, with some magnificently orchestrated tunes that'll make *The Lord Of The Rings* sound like a bunch of schoolkids banging on pots.

"You play as the god of the Greeks, a people on the knife-edge of annihilation"



Zooming into the battles reveals an incredibly impressive level of detail.

physics engineer Chris Blackbourn's desk, a long-haired man who's so busy piling rocks into a giant on-screen urn that he doesn't even register our arrival.

"The same goes for containers," continues Peter, as Chris becomes aware of our presence. "If you have a container holding different things – such as a variety of rocks and pebbles – and you break that container, the things will all fall out how you'd expect them to in real life." Bang on cue, Chris is on the case, topping up the humongous pitcher with the remnants of his pile of rubble, leaving one, evilly jagged boulder spare. Picking it up with his giant on-screen mit, he hurls it at the pot.

Folding like a fat man punched in the gut the container collapses, ceramic splinters cascading to the floor, their descent merged with tumbling rocks and pebbles which ricochet off each other and scatter wildly across the ground. He repeats the process, again and again, each time the result different.

"Now imagine doing that at the top of a hill in order to start a giant landslide to attack a town below," enthuses Peter. "Or you may want to create a makeshift prisoner of war camp by putting people in one of these containers and half filling it with water. This means that the ones at the bottom are either crushed or drowned, and when you break it open, they all fall

IT'S A MIRACLE – PART ONE

OH IT'S NOTHING, JUST YOUR EVERYDAY MIRACLE

B&W2 wouldn't be complete without the ability to cast an array of spells, the lesser of which are called 'everyday miracles'. As Peter Molyneux explains: "These are miracles such as fire, water and healing and they're very upgradeable. You start off with the ability to spray fire from your fingertips, and later it becomes more like napalm. With water, you start off with a dribble, but by the end of the game it's more like a water cannon. If you have a landscape with a basin in it, you can even fill it with water and use it as form of defence for your city."



Everyday miracles include a versatile healing spell.

out correctly depending on whether they're dead or alive, wet or dry."

Peter continues: "You can be as destructive or creative as you wish. You can stack things, quickly and easily. You could create a barrier out of rocks and wood or any other object in the land, or make a giant seesaw with a plank and a stone, then put a rock on one end to make your own makeshift catapult."

HASTA LA VISTA, BABY

Studio head Jonty Barnes interjects with an idea that came to him in a dream, in which he defeated Peter in a multiplayer game by freezing all his troops, then shattering them with rocks.

Peter looks impressed and makes a mental note, an example of the ever-evolving and open-ended development process that he both preaches and allows

his team to practice. While the two jokily discuss their multiplayer prowess, Chris loads up a new level with a towering wall arching majestically across a valley floor.

Once again he picks up a boulder, and tosses it at the structure. But the wall holds firm. Instead, the rock shatters, its razor-like splinters dropping impotently to the grass. "I bet you weren't expecting that, were you?" beams Chris with a hint of deserved smugness. "Bet you thought the wall was going to crack didn't you?" I'm duly impressed. But it's time to move on and Peter and Jonty, now seriously considering the shattering troop idea, lead us on to another section of desks at the other end of the office.

CREATURE DISCOMFORTS

One of the most important and unique features of *Black & White* was your



Three stages of alignment. A goody two-shoes wolf... ...a neutral, sit-on-the-fence-type wolf...

...and a big, bad, phonebox-smashing wolf.



Like any good RTS, each race will have unique-looking buildings.



The more impressive your city, the more your enemies will want it.

creature. But these furry giants that you nurtured from birth, moulding their psychological makeup and teaching them the difference between right and wrong before having them turn on you because you're embarrassing and don't understand them (OK, maybe not that last one), were also one of the game's major flaws. All that's about to change in *B&W2*.

"In Black & White, you couldn't instruct your creatures – but now you can"

PETER MOLYNEUX, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

Anton Kirczenow and Sebastian Schoellhammer are Black & White Studios' 3D creature programmers. They're both clearly very passionate about their work, and on seeing us are already jockeying for position to be the first to show off their work.

On Anton's monitor, a titanic battle is unfolding between a gargantuan lion and a grey-haired wolf. The creatures, circling each other warily at first, suddenly spring into action, rolling along the ground as they battle for the upper hand. Their momentum slows and the regal lion is pinned to the floor by the now rabid wolf, which is viciously lashing out at its trapped prey, filling the air with a

maelstrom of hair and skin with a barrage of ripping blows. But Peter wants to talk about the creatures' other abilities first, so Anton's demonstration will have to wait.

"In *B&W* you couldn't instruct your creatures, but now they'll obey your instructions," begins Peter, settling down in a seat between the two men's desks. "You can choose from a lion, ape, cow,

wolf and maybe a tiger, each of which has their own unique characteristics. A massive fault with *B&W* was that you had to sit and watch your creature the whole time and wait for it to do something before telling it whether it was right or wrong. Now you'll be able to see a list of things it's done recently, and punish or reward it accordingly – even if it's done the deed ten minutes ago."

A QUICK SUMMARY

Peter's in his stride now, furbishing me with golden nuggets of information on the subject of creature training, detailed enough to fill three previews. Here are the highlights. First off, there's 'the leash of

IT'S A MIRACLE – PART TWO

THERE AIN'T NO MIRACLE LIKE AN EPIC MIRACLE

A volcano erupting, consuming villages with its lava and bursting rocks. A siren seducing an enemy army and leading them to their doom. An earthquake which cracks open the land and sends your enemies to an early grave. That's what you can expect from *B&W2*'s 'epic miracles'. "Epic miracles are completely over the top," explains Peter. "You need to build a dedicated place of worship to cast them. These will be the biggest structures in your town." But while these spells may be impressive in their devastation, be prepared to spend a great deal of time and resources to attain them. Well, you didn't think it would be easy, did you?



Epic miracles are as impressive to watch as they are powerful.



Come on, own up – who ate all the grass?



Your cities can become so magnificent, other tribes will want to join you.



In *B&W2*, build a farm and your people will grow their own crops.

mimicking'. You do a task, it does a task. Simple. Your creature can also learn by watching your behaviour, then act autonomously when it deems certain tasks need doing. Example? Your villagers run low on the game's only resource, ore, so it'll help to gather more. And if its actions satisfy you 'Oh Mighty One-Handed One', then you can place rewards in its all-new creature pen.

With Anton and Sebastian wanting to show us more, Peter is called away to an important call and Jonty takes over the tour, urged by his departing boss to tell

me about the final new way of teaching your beast. "There's a whole new mechanic called Blueprints. These teach your creature specific things, so you don't have to. These may vary from building a wall, repairing buildings or military tactics, such as using archers on high ground when it leads your armies." With that, it's time to see Anton and Sebastian's amazing 'creature circus'.

THE GOOD AND THE UGLY

"Each creature has unique fighting animations. They'll fight dirty if they're evil



Creatures can be trained to lead your armies, and will get stuck in themselves too.

and rip off chunks of flesh," explains Jonty as Anton loads up a wolf. Its sleek, long fur trembles in the breeze, each hair modelled perfectly and rising in sync with every heave of its massive chest. Its movements, lithe and flowing, exude cool.

Slowly it begins to change, metamorphosing into a hideous werewolf-like beast as Anton pushes a slider along an alignment panel, transforming it from good to evil.

"We've made creatures interact with the world much more. If it starts to rain, their fur gets wet, and if they do physical work, their muscles grow," says Anton. "You'll no longer control your creature directly in a fight either," chimes in Jonty. Thankfully, aiding it with a few well-placed fireballs will be allowed. "Imagine these creatures fighting within a city with our physics system in place, rolling on the

floor. Imagine the devastation!" It's a mouth-watering prospect.

Back to Sebastian, who's keen to show us his creation, a monkey. Presented on the screen before me is a giant ape, rotating. He shows off its bumpmapped textures, pointing to the leathery, horn-studded back of the maniacal creature that looks one banana short of a bunch. "Even the scars will be bumpmapped," he enthuses, injuring the beast so gaping gashes appear on its torso. I stare in disbelief, but with time running short, we have to move on again.

RETURN TO END

And so we arrive at our final destination, the desk of Matthew Wiggins, head buried in *The Art Of Warfare On Land*. Looking up, he scrabbles to his keyboard to show us how he's putting theory into practice.

"Some of the game's bigger battles will feature thousands of troops," says Jonty as Matthew lines up a column of troops two-deep and 50-long at the base of a hill. "You've got siege engines too, like catapults to knock down enemy walls, but it'll take a very long time, just like in real siege warfare," he continues, while Matthew brings up several groups of enemy foot soldiers, and places them into a variety of formations.

Watching from above, they look like tiny dots, an army of ants, not a group of baying soldiers. As if sensing my trepidation, Matthew explains how you keep track of whose troops are whose. "Certain coloured bubbles encircle your troop formations, making it obvious from above which groups of warriors are yours and how they're faring in battle." Without warning, he unleashes hell. Ranks of red

Why Don't You?...



Can B&W2 match Rome?

TO BE THE BEST, YOU NEED TO BEAT THE BEST

It's still early days I know, with soldiers yet to be given proper shadows or made to feel weighty within the world, but something is niggling me about the troop battles. The 'Bubble' works well when directing your troops from above, but from what I saw, the combat currently falls shy of the visual splendour and sheer exhilarating ferocity of *Rome: Total War*. That's not to say that *B&W2*'s combat isn't looking good (up close it's pretty damn impressive), but making its mechanics a bit more like Creative Assembly's staggering-looking war simulation could make *Black & White 2* the ultimate strategy game.

bubbled formations surge towards the thin, green bubble-enwrapped column on the hill, slowing slightly as they hit the incline, their wedged set-up cutting deep and scattering the defenders.

Zooming into the action, we can see the massacre up close: individually modelled soldiers are scrapping for their lives as their swords cut into flesh and send out a cacophony of screams from the straining speakers. However, just like the fallen, we've run out of time.

It's six o'clock and Jonty, Peter and the rest of the team still have five hours of work ahead of them. Their tireless and undying dedication to the job, a labour of love, a way of life, clearly paying off from the results I've seen. As I bid my farewells, it's hard not to be impressed. Although it's still some way off completion, if *Black & White 2* can deliver on its promises, it could well be as near to a life-changing experience as a game can get. Time, as ever, will tell. **PC**

NICE 'N' EASY DOES IT

THE ETERNAL QUESTION - HOW DO YOU MAKE A COMPLICATED GAME EASY TO PLAY?

Over to head honcho Peter Molyneux. "If you want, you can just build armies out of your population, then take them out and attack other races. This will swell your population and ultimately, your army. You can even completely ignore your creature and concentrate on armies. This is the simplest way to play the game. A step up from this will be building a base with some basic structures while attacking your enemies." And what about all the boring micro-management from the first game? "If you build a farm, then your people can eat - it's much simpler this time around." Well, that clears that up then.



Attack! Attack!

Charlie Dimmock's...

GROUND CONTROL 2: OPERATION EXODUS

 LAST
PREVIEW
PCZONE
ISSUE
137

You can leave your harvester in the garage – GC2 is pure battle tactics.

It's war! The epic RTS sequel is almost upon us, as control freak Richie Shoemaker prepares his ground assault

REAL-TIME strategy games may be a hoot to play, but they're usually about as realistic in their depiction of war as *Tetris* is of masonry. If such games were ever intended to duplicate state-sanctioned butchery, half the civilian population of the United States would be out chopping wood, breaking rocks and picking berries in order to supply their huge military machine. You

can almost imagine George Bush Jr sitting behind his desk in the Oval Office, motioning one of his lackeys over to enquire about tank production, only to be told: "We're short about 30 loaves of bread Mister President, but as soon as the granary is built we should be OK to take out Eye-ran."

Anyway, the point is that when it comes to mass conflict of a heavily armed nature, field commanders shouldn't have to worry about harvesting ore or researching various technologies in order to feed their war machine, as the only resource that needs managing are the men and machines employed to kill the enemy. Such is the gorgeously simple premise adopted by the original *Ground Control*, and we can't tell you how happy we are that the sequel shares the same agenda.

CITIES IN DUST

Set more than 300 years after the planet-wide war of the original, *Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus* focuses its

attentions on the planet of Morningstar Prime, the last free world of the Northern Star Alliance and a prime target for forceful reintegration into the Terran Empire. From orbit the draconian Terrans have mercilessly bombarded hundreds of cities, and as the game begins their troopships have started their descent to take out the few cities left standing. Your job as the military leader of the NSA is to halt their advance, or at least delay it until a lasting sanctuary or some technological miracle can be procured.

We've been playing around with some pre-Alpha code recently, and we have to say it's all looking rather

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Massive Entertainment
PUBLISHER VU Games
WEBSITE www.groundcontrol2.com
ETA June 18

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Far more tactically advanced than the original
- Looks rather spiffing
- Full co-operative campaign and skirmish modes, plus the intriguing 'drop-in' multiplayer mode
- Focus on battles rather than base-building

CV

MASSIVE ENTERTAINMENT

Not to be confused with the German developer of the same name, this Massive Entertainment is based in Sweden.

- 1999** The year that 3D strategy games started getting good and the year we caught our first whiff of how *Ground Control* might be even better.
- 2000** *Ground Control* is released to critical acclaim, soon followed by the expansion *Dark Conspiracy*.
- 2002** Massive signs up to develop a couple of mobile phone titles.
- 2003** Massive Entertainment is bought up by its publisher.
- 2004** In a few short months *Ground Control 2* will be out.



"I'm sure I parked my Stealth Jeep around here somewhere..."



Now with scary organic alien thingies!



Up to four people can play the entire single-player campaign co-operatively.

impressive. The mission structure is entirely linear, but developer Massive Entertainment is hoping that the strength of its story and characters will more than make up for the lack of freeform grand strategy. Instead, the scope for open-ended gameplay will assert itself in the missions themselves, of which there are 30 all told.

This new feature is ably demonstrated in the opening mission, where a small team of NSA troops is sent in to retrieve an unidentified object from behind enemy lines. Posted into various buildings flanking a once glorious town square, the troops lie in wait to ambush a patrol, all guns trained inwards to create a merciless crossfire that will leave few Imperial



The aliens took the concept of the 'escape pod' a little too literally...

"As well as the undulating and varied landscapes, GC2's maps are littered with imposing landmarks"

LIE IN WAIT

The original game was characterised by rather featureless terrain. This time, as well as the undulating and varied landscapes, GC2's maps are littered with imposing landmarks. You've got elaborate military bases that can only be overrun by co-ordinated attacks, dense forests capable of hiding dozens of shock troops, and vast ruined cities where soldiers can not only enter the crumbling piles of stone and metal, but take positions on various levels with firing positions set to ambush in specific directions.



Strider crews will be able to see further when their hatches are open.

soldiers standing. Without full use of cover and surprise tactics the mission would be impossible.

Like its predecessor, there's no troop creation in *Ground Control 2*. You don't have an endless stream of instantly-trained soldiers to draw on, and it's for exactly this reason that GC2 is such a tactically astute game, one that's arguably far closer in scope and scale to the likes of *X-Com* than *Command & Conquer*, despite its frantic real-time demands.

DROP ZONE

Further enhancements have been made to other parts of the game. For example, rather than expecting pre-assigned squads of reinforcements to arrive at



preordained intervals, GC2 introduces a system whereby your success on the battlefield will allow you to call on more and better reinforcements at virtually any time in the mission. The quicker you overrun the enemy and the more casualties you inflict upon them, the more Acquisition Points you rack up and so the more troops, tanks and close air support units you can draw from. Reinforcements must however be brought in at designated landing zones, which more than likely will be in the control of the enemy. Hold the LZ for long enough and success is assured.

This makes the dropship something of a pivotal unit in the game, yet it isn't just an elaborate way of getting new units on to the field of play. Instead of

The AI troops will run away if they feel they have no chance of winning. You might want to follow their example.

filling it with troops and tanks, you can load it with missiles and bombs and have it patrol the battlefield. Or you could fill it up with sensor equipment and scout out the map. The more fuel you load, the longer it will stay aloft to pinpoint the enemy units. Of course, if

WEATHER REPORTING FOR DUTY

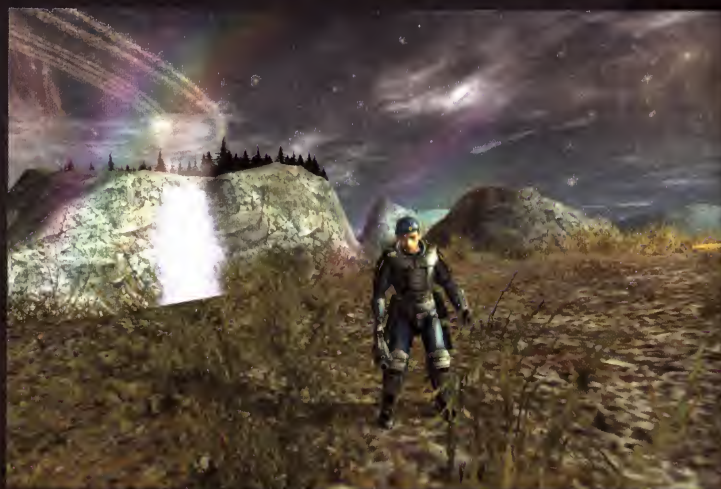


RAIN, SHINE, SLEET OR SNOW, THE OUTLOOK IS GOOD WHATEVER THE WEATHER

Absent completely from the original game, the element of weather will now play a crucial role in how you plan and co-ordinate your attacks. A heavy downpour will slow down your entire army, especially vehicles, while various types of stormy conditions may short out electronic systems, reduce visibility or even damage certain units. Snow, while a bugger for your tanks and troop carriers, will actually speed up your ground troops, while high winds will affect the movement of the game's hover vehicles. Weather patterns can also change in seconds, not from tropical sun to arctic blizzards perhaps, but the changes will be random – meaning commanders need to be prepared to change strategy if the skies darken.



Rain has swayed the course of many an historic conflict – so too here.



"You think shooting from the hip is cool? Try shooting from the knee, mofo!"

"The visual effects that complement the alien weapons are cool as hell"

your dropship is taken out you can forget getting any reinforcements for the rest of the level.

ALIEN RESURRECTION

As well as the liberal freedom-loving forces of the NSA and their brutal Imperial aggressors, *Ground Control 2* introduces a new playable race going by the name of the Virons (no relation to the Vogons, more's the pity). Pug-ugly, big and brutish, it would appear these nomadic invaders are there simply to fight over the scraps and add their peculiar brand of organic weapons and machinery to the mix. However, the appearance of the Virons is central to

the story, as they are keen to exact revenge for some past transgression.

Rather than having to rely on off-field support, the Virons are able to adapt from their stock of four basic units by melding units together on the battlefield. An engineer and a tank will produce a repair vehicle, whilst a stock grunt mated with an alien hover unit (they're still arguing over what to call these things) will produce a kind of sniping hovercraft thing that fires gas bombs, the lethal clouds of which will drift across the battlefield with the wind. It looks more impressive than it sounds and some of the visual effects that complement the alien weapons are cool



The perils of smoking in your giant alien terrapin thingy.

Q&A

JOSÉ ALLER



VU Games' senior producer co-operates in some multiplayer questioning.

PCZ The original game was well received, but the multiplayer side wasn't fully explored by players.

Why do you think that was?

JA *Ground Control* was original in its focus on action/tactics strategy as opposed to the more traditional RTS-style games of the time. Although the online 'drop in' feature was a fantastic and unique idea, the overall online support was never fully backed or exploited from a development or marketing perspective. It was in many ways a limited feature.

PCZ How will you ensure *GC2*'s multiplayer game lives on past the single-player campaign?

JA The game will feature greater online support both from a marketing side and in terms of user input. There'll be dedicated server support for official tournaments, and players will be able to create their own maps to play online. We'll also have dedicated servers in Europe, Asia and the US.

PCZ How will co-operative missions differ from the solo game?

JA Co-operative missions will differ as little as possible from the solo game, and will initially allow you to play the single-player campaign together with friends.

PCZ Tell us about drop-in multiplayer...

JA This fantastic feature gives the player plenty of freedom to drop in or out of a game without disrupting the other players. You could play for a few minutes or hours. You could be involved in a David and Goliath situation and win! The variety in online battles is taken a step forward with this feature.

PCZ Any plans to introduce a semi-persistent multiplayer campaign, something like *Total Annihilation*'s old Boneyards service?

JA This would be a great feature, but the schedule is tight, so it probably won't make it into the release version.

as hell. One artillery unit sends out a kind of tectonic shockwave that ripples along the ground, flooring infantry and rattling vehicles beyond repair.

FLAMES OF FREEDOM

Of course, the aliens aren't the only ones able to field interesting machines, and while the NSA favours traditional projectile weapons and tracked vehicles and the Empire enjoys lasers and anti-grav hoverdynes, there are a number of unique and interesting units to look forward to. Not least of these is the otherwise innocuous-looking minesweeper, a vehicle that flails the ground, churning up clods of earth as it ceaselessly searches for hidden mines, while at the rear it lays explosive traps for enemy infantry. Because of their lumbering speed, an alternative function is to extend protective wings that shield infantry advancing from behind.

It isn't just the units themselves that we're looking forward to though – it's the added functionality of these units as well. Snipers, for instance, can be posted secretly on high ground to act as spotters for distant artillery guns, while the engineer can not only mend damaged vehicles and buildings, but erect small

fortifications and static gun turrets to aid in a hasty defence. Tanks, when asked to retreat, will do so in reverse, making sure their strongest side is always facing the enemy. It's simple yet obvious features like this that make *GC2* such a constant joy.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE

One aspect that hasn't changed is the attention to detail in the graphics and the simplicity of the user interface. The developers are once again making use of a free-floating camera that will allow for an almost unlimited scope to view the battlefield. You can zoom in close enough to each soldier to make out nasal hairs, or pull back to



Infantry boast no less than six different motion-captured death animations.



You'll be able to save mid-mission this time (a collective sigh of relief is heard).

Why Don't You?...

SUPPLY IN DEMAND

If the developers stick to the current plan, Acquisition Points will be the currency used to buy in reinforcements. As sound as this concept seems, we're convinced it could be taken further. For a start, ditch the term Acquisition Points, which is a tad misleading, and replace it with Supply Points. This would allow an important resource to be added to the game, in the form of ammunition. I'm sure the developers would argue such a thing would overcomplicate the game and take the focus away from the action, but I'm of the opinion that it would lend the proceedings a more tactical edge. Resupply could be as simple as clicking a button and ammo would be replenished at the cost of a few – but sometimes vital – Supply Points, and it would certainly make you think a bit more before loosing off rounds into the sky.

view entire battalions going hammer and tongs from above.

Similarly, units will gain experience points as they progress, which will not only make them better fighters, but more specialised depending on their combat familiarity.

Line of sight and elevation will be central to success, although it won't be enough to be within a certain radius of the enemy to unveil them – your leading unit must be able to actually see them before they're revealed.

Admittedly, aside from the visual makeover, new vehicles and added functionality, there isn't much that's fundamentally new in *GC2*. However, as was the case with *Homeworld 2*, the countless subtle differences look set to make a huge impact on the way the game plays. Those who know the original and believe they can imagine what the sequel is going to be like may be in for quite a shock, as for pure tactical sophistication *Ground Control 2* may well end up being the strategy game of the year. **PCZ**



"Who made me wear this stupid polo neck?"

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Namco/Bitmap Brothers

PUBLISHER LSP Games

WEBSITE www.namco.com

ETA Late March

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Emphasis on using cover
- Offensive Cover System lets you shoot round corners, fire blind and keep a low profile
- Smart enemies also know how to use cover
- Fifteen bullet-ridden levels set in real-life political hotspots

CV

namco

NAMCO

Pac-Man, Pole Position, Ridge Racer, Tekken – the impact of Namco on the world of games is inestimable. We couldn't possibly cover its entire back catalogue, but here's some recent PC conversions.

2001 *Mr Driller*. Classic arcade game from the kings of arcade gaming. Sublime.

2003 *Dead To Rights*. The first of a new batch of Namco games coming to PC, *DtR* failed to impress us.

Gimme shelter...

KILL.SWITCH

It's heads down, guns up as Namco's latest shooter makes its way warily to PC. Anthony Holden finds deep cover

NO MATTER how cool the resulting scar or how great the respect earned from one's peers, no-one wants to take a bullet. Getting shot hurts – a lot. And it has a nasty habit of killing you in the process.

Not that we'd know of course, as we at *PC ZONE* are cowards to a man. If ever a shoot-out erupted in our vicinity, we'd be the first ones hiding under the sink, whimpering like freshly spayed puppies and praying to every god under the sun.

Given this rather, er, overactive sense of self-preservation, the antics of Maxwell Payne and his ilk can often seem a little irresponsible. There he is, outnumbered, outgunned and fighting for survival and he just waltzes from place to place, shooting whatever moves and absorbing countless bullets in the process. OK, so Maxy Baby

can slow down time and leap around like a sugar-loaded preschooler, but even so there's got to be a more sensible way of approaching things.

DUCK AND COVER

And thus we come to *kill.switch*. Developed by arcade-action stalwarts Namco, *kill.switch* is a third-person shooter that's all about self-preservation. Rather than rushing around blindly and choking down painkillers to cope with the excruciating bullet wounds, *kill.switch* sees you hugging walls, crouching behind cars, shooting round corners and doing pretty much anything to avoid exposing your precious, delicate flesh. It's what the developers call the Offensive Cover System, but to us it's just plain common sense.

"*Kill.switch* focuses on using cover," says the game's producer Jerome Sicart. "All the environments are built around the concept of utilising the environment to your advantage. Popping out from cover and exposing yourself to fire might work in other games, but it just isn't realistic. In real life, you're more likely to fire from behind cover with little to no exposure of yourself at all."

To facilitate this idea, *kill.switch* employs a simple 'take cover' key, which allows you to cower behind any decent-sized object in the game, from pillars and walls to burnt-out cars, crates and random bits of debris. If you're near a wall you'll hug up next to it in stealth-action style; if it's a crate you'll crouch behind it, conforming to its shape as best as possible.

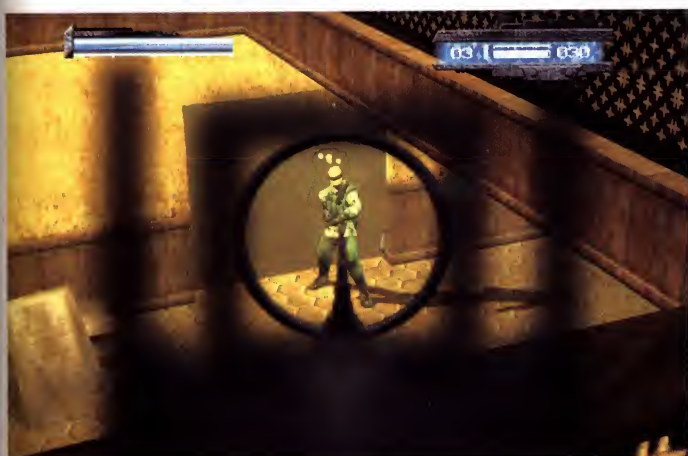


Solid Snake makes a cameo appearance.

MAKING THE SWITCH

KILL SWITCH IS DOING ITS DARNEDEST TO BE A PROPER PC GAME

Kill.switch may be all too obviously consoley in design, but the Bitmap Brothers are making every effort to bring it up to true PC spec. For a start, they've added Dolby digital sound, upped the resolution and are now working to improve the graphics across the board. Needless to say, the control system will be optimised to mouse and keyboard, though this is a far greater task than simply mapping keypad controls to a new interface. The more responsive mouse control will bring a range of game balancing issues with it, and the Bitmaps are currently tearing their hair out trying to resolve these. The PC version may feature more enemies than other versions, tougher enemies, or simply a more cautious, intelligent breed of foe. A bit of pitch and yaw is being considered for sniper weapons, as well as more punishing stealth elements. Let's hope the results are tangible come March.



Mouselook makes this guy easy pickings.



"98, 99, 100! Coming, ready or no-ot!"

"While taking cover," continues Sicart, "you have the option of either revealing a small part of yourself for aimed shots, or you can perform what we call 'Blindfire'. As the name suggests, this lets you fire blind, spraying shots in the vague direction of the weapon sight. It's not very accurate, but sometimes it's your only option."

CLEARING HOUSE

In practice, this simple game mechanic makes for a nice shift in tempo from your usual shoot 'em up fare. We've spent some time with the first build of the PC version (now in the capable hands of the

from room to room, swinging his gun through doorways and yelling 'Clear!' when all the angles are covered.

MORAL DESERT

Namco is also rather chuffed about the plot it's devised for *kill.switch* (though considering the company's previous narrative achievements include *Tekken 3* and *Ms Pac-Man Maze Madness*, this is hardly surprising). At a glance it's the usual Hollywood guff, as you take the role of Bishop, a highly trained covert op deep behind enemy lines, sent on a globe-hopping tour of popular global flashpoints such as North Korea, the

"It's all about self-preservation – doing pretty much anything to avoid exposing your precious, delicate flesh"

Bitmap Brothers), and it's already shaping up to be an enjoyable blast.

Finding cover in the environments is usually a simple matter, but finding the best bit of cover – the spot that protects you from all angles and allows you a decent line of fire at the enemies – isn't always so straightforward. To complicate matters, enemies can use cover in exactly the same manner as you, as well as using blindfire and even calling in air support when pinned down, which can cause all sorts of bother.

If you stay in one place too long, your antagonists will eventually creep forward and overwhelm you, so you have to be quick about things as well. Essentially you need to stay on the move, taking cover wherever possible, leaning out, sniping a bit, then laying down some suppressing fire before dashing to the next doorway/market stall/conveniently placed tea chest and diving into its shadows. Best of all, it captures perfectly that classic Hollywood scene where the cop or SWAT guy moves

Middle East and an oil rig in the Caspian Sea. However, the twist is that you're not here to save the world. Quite the contrary in fact, as your task is essentially to aggravate the locals and trigger a carefully engineered war. This might involve assassinating a high-level general, blowing up an oil rig or leaving a gift-wrapped turd in Kim Jong-Il's letterbox. (Well, maybe not the last one.) In any case, the dubious morality is sure to make for a more interesting and colourful game.

However, without wishing to piss on Namco's parade, it should probably be noted that *kill.switch* began its life as a console game. And while infinitely better suited to the PC than the recent *Dead To Rights* (also from Namco and reviewed on page 80), *kill.switch* is never going to match the sophistication of a pure PC shooter. But with a few neat tricks up its sleeve and a genuinely novel gameplay dynamic, it should be a solid addition to the genre. Review next issue.

04:36.12
TIME



You can actually hear the bells of that church as you pass – cool.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Codemasters
PUBLISHER Codemasters
WEBSITE www.codemasters.co.uk/colinmcraerally04/
ETA March

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Colin McRae* is the best rally game on any platform
- Hugely expanded multiplayer options
- Physics and handling engine tweaked to new levels of realism
- Even more tracks, cars, tyres and spare parts than ever

Pure filth...

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

Time to dish the dirt on the latest rally game starring the surly Scot. **Steve O'Hagan** jumps into the driving seat and prepares to get muddy

LIKE MANY other activities such as jogging, revising for exams and hand-to-gland combat, it's debatable whether racing games are best enjoyed alone or with others. Some go for the crowded tracks and pristine technology of F1. Others prefer to muck in with the rally drivers, where it's the pure thrill of you against the track and the clock.

And on PC or console, there's been none better at recreating the mud-caked world of rally driving than the *Colin McRae Rally* series. With its legendary handling and brilliantly visualised real-life

courses and cars, *Colin McRae* has been nigh on

untouchable in its field for over five years.

If you've sampled the previous bouts of mud wrestling featuring cuddly Colin, no doubt you're keen to know what's new in this



CV

Codemasters

CODEMASTERS

With over 60 number one hits to its name (so says the website), we could be here a while. So, to save on space, we'll stick to a couple of this British behemoth's top racing titles.

1998 *Colin McRae Rally*. Is it really six years ago now? Good god. Well, before you start crying into your pint, here's a toast to the first in the series of the now legendary rally series. This first incarnation blew people away and set the standard for what was to come.

2003 *Toca Race Driver*. The most recent addition to the long-running touring car series, *Race Driver* took the TOCA formula and added a campaign-like storyline. It worked pretty well too.



The post-race replays give you pretty stunning views on your performance.



Ah, the glitz and glamour of the rally circuit.

fourth incarnation. And the first thing any veteran will notice is that you're no longer restricted to driving in McRae's long-cherished Ford Focus, as his contract with Ford has expired. Now, you can rev up in several cars right from the off.

NEVER TIRE

As you start whipping the various courses and championships, you'll open up more of the 23 officially licensed cars, taking in models in the four-wheel and two-wheel drive categories, as well as some of the now banned Group B 1980s road monsters and a few other bonus models. We can also reveal that the number of different tyre types is up from last year's ten to a total of 19, with 34 different road surfaces to contend with too.

If you're an old hand at *Rally*, once out on the road you'll start to notice that not only is the handling even more gruellingly realistic and taxing (see boxout overleaf), but things also look more slick and detailed. Arguably, there's no better way to show off a top-end graphics card than with a good racing game. Watching someone cane a Subaru round the hills of West Wales on *CM04* with the resolution cranked up supports this more than ever.

Stupendous lighting effects mean every panel, pane and decal of your

gleaming motor reflects – until you reach the finish line, by which time the whole thing will doubtless be plastered in mud. The sun gleams on the black ice, the trees, thick with vegetation, sway gently with the wind. Even if it is difficult to take it in as you gun down a straight at 100mph.

On top of this, if you're one of those to whom cars are like a kind of pornography, a special mode lets you ogle the



The expanded damage system is highly tweakable and now includes engine damage.



New in *Rally 04*: the bumper cam driving perspective.

“With its legendary handling and brilliantly visualised courses and cars, *Colin McRae* has been nigh on untouchable for over five years”





The new Expert mode enforces cockpit view, sensitive damage model and manual gearshift.

painstakingly modelled vehicles from practically every angle, opening the doors and peering up the exhaust pipe.

And while there can be little as excruciating as watching a novice prang his way round a course, unable to resist taking every tree and wall head-on, the superb damage modelling makes such a sight a spectacle rather than a chore.



Surely you can out-race that!

Windscreens crack then shatter, bumpers, panels, doors and even wheels get knackered and start falling off. Given a sufficient level of ineptitude, what crosses the finish line can bear as much resemblance to the polished showroom



HANDLE WITHOUT CARE



Colin McRae Rally 04: so real, you'll leave skidmarks.

THE SUPERB HANDLING HAS ALWAYS MADE COLIN MCRACRUE GAMES STAND OUT, AND FOR RALLY 04 IT'S BEEN TWEAKED EVEN MORE

Flinging those finely tuned racers round hairpins and over hillocks is a seat-of-the-pants experience in CM games, and CM04 has done nothing to dilute this gritty handling trademark. Instead, the latest outing manages to ratchet things to even greater levels of evocative realism.

Previously, you could practically feel the tyres grappling with the treacherous surfaces, but now you can take 'practically' and change it to 'actually'. For CM04, the developer has done away with the 'steering aid', which up to now meant the car's handling was determined around a central pivot point. This has now been removed, meaning each tyre's grip on the surface is treated individually, making the whole thing even more like taming a wild beast.

While you might not be able to put your finger on this being the change when playing CM04, if you're a fan of the series, you'll notice immediately that the way the car skids, skews and lurches around is that little bit more gratifying. With a decent steering wheel (preferably with pedals), blasting round CM04's superb-looking courses promises to be a very pleasant drive indeed.

model as Jo Brand does to Gwyneth Paltrow. Totally trash your motor in the full championship mode, however, and as in real life, you only get the chance for an overhaul every two races.

GHOST IN THE MACHINE

Unsurprisingly, given the nature of rally, there's been no multiplayer modes in previous games to speak of. That's all set to change with CM04 though, as a bunch of online and LAN options now means up

Petter Solberg overtaking him on a tight bend is anyone's guess.

Otherwise, you can expect to race through the usual assortment of entire championships, rallies and individual stages in the same eight countries as before. In between races in the main mode, you'll also be offered special challenges where you have to evaluate new and experimental equipment. Complete the challenge and you earn the part in question – be it an engine or some tyres –

“You’ll notice immediately that the way the car skids, skews and lurches is that little bit more gratifying”

to eight players can try and out-rev each other through stages or entire rallies.

“But it's a travesty to have more than one car on the road at a time in a rally game,” you cry. Never fear, as opposing drivers will appear as ghost cars, though how our Colin would react to a spectral

which all goes towards improving your vehicle's performance for future races.

There's little doubt that Colin McRae Rally 04 is going to be a quality product. Whether it offers enough to entice owners of CM03 is another question. Stay tuned for a review next issue. **PCZ**



The scenery, backdrops and roadside clutter are all spot on.

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Hallowed be thy maim... SACRED

Chief fantasist **Steve O'Hagan** examines the latest attempt to take on *Diablo* at its own game. Is nothing sacred in this day and mage?



Even the wildlife is after your blood.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Ascaron
PUBLISHER Deep Silver
WEBSITE www.ascaron.com/gb/gb_sacred
ETA March 19

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- *Diablo*-style action
- Massive, highly populated game world
- Huge number of missions and quests
- Create your own combinations of magic and normal attacks

CV



ASCARON

Hailing from the small town of Gutersloh in western Germany, Ascaron has been around for yonks, bashing out economic management sims and sports games that sell bucketloads in the land of the sausage.

1993 *Patrician* The game that made the company's name. You play a northern European sea trader who has to rise to the rank of patrician in the local town.

2001 *Patrician II* The original formula was, for many, perfected with this update, refining the economics and combat system, while updating the visuals for the graphics card generation.

2003 *Port Royale: Gold, Power And Pirates* Like *Patrician*, only with more combat and set in the Caribbean. Plenty of fun, though a bit opaque for the non-strategy fan.

2003 *Tortuga: Pirates Of The New World* Like *Port Royale*, only with even more combat. A bit of a low point really, considering this was the same as a game released barely six months previous.



Yellow icons above NPCs show whether they offer quests or services.



Pick up a new weapon, some herbs or a new rug for your hovel.

FEW GAMERS will look at *Sacred* and think: "Wow, this looks unusual!" Its isometric 2D viewpoint, point-and-click combat and scuttling gangs of orcs, goblins and trolls gives it the kind of familiarity usually reserved for close family members and that jaz mag you've kept since you were 14.

But after a few hours' play, you begin to realise that breaking genre boundaries is not the point of this combat-heavy RPG. Instead, it wants to take what we already love, enlarge it, refine it and then let us gorge upon it once more. It's *Diablo* with better visuals and more freedom of exploration. It's *Divine Divinity* with more interesting character classes and a streamlined interface. Or at least it will be if it turns out as it should.

Wanting to get to the action, we'll dispense with the plot in an instance: a dark mage is trying to summon a demon

to devour the world of Ancaria (yes, that old chestnut). Your first choice along the road to thwarting this psychotic conjuror is to choose a character class, the first of a Pandora's box-full of familiar choices for the RPG fan. While you've got your tried-and-tested warrior, magician and wood elf archer, *Sacred* offers a few nice variations of its own here. Take a look at the box opposite for more on this.

BROKEN ARROW

Once you've settled on your hero, it's out into the big wide world, with your trigger finger on your trusty mouse button, ready to dispatch the many creatures that will be set against you. The environment is presented from a 2D viewpoint that can be zoomed, but not panned or rotated.

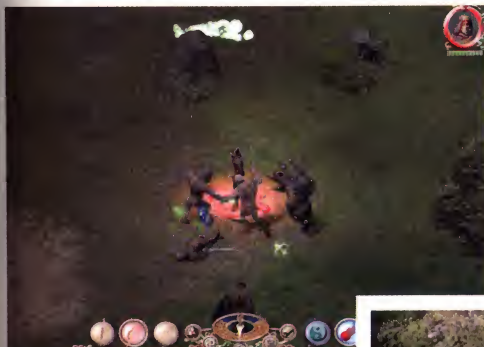
The visuals are pristine and nicely detailed, from little frolicking bunnies to arrows sticking out of the side of your

foe's armour. On the high-res mode (which you should be able to run if you've got a 64MB graphics card), things look particularly sharp, with rustling leaves, shimmering water and lifelike weather changing subtly in front of you.

What soon impresses is how densely populated this land is – both with life and adventure. Though you have an overriding quest line you have to follow, the game boasts around 200 side-quests for the more intrepid adventurer. Every town, village, hamlet and farmstead seems to have a tale of woe that needs righting. Venture off the path even a little and you can almost be guaranteed of stumbling across a goblin lair, a slave-traders' hideout or an enchantress's tower. And since 75 per cent of the massive gameworld is open to exploration from the start, you're never going to be short of something to do in the land of Ancaria.



The Seraphim has ranged magic and not many clothes.



Ring-a-ring-a-rosy, orc style.

As you wander through the more friendly areas of the land, you'll encounter the usual collection of merchants and ironsmiths to offload your booty to, as well as a few unexpected traders such as a horse-dealer. Unlike most games in the genre, *Sacred* enables you to saddle up and travel – as well as fight – from the back of a trusty steed. And one look at the size of the gameworld will tell you that this is a good idea, as travel between towns when not using magical teleportation gates can be tortuously slow on foot.

GOTTA HAVE A SYSTEM

The combat system is where a game of this nature lives and dies, and once again, as well as a slew of dependable features from other games, *Sacred* manages to pull a few new tricks out of its sleeves.

Basically, it's a 'point the mouse at the enemy and click to attack' number. However, changing between different types of weapon or special attack is much easier than in similar games, encouraging a more tactical approach. So instead of just wading in to a bunch of enemies as the Gladiator, you might use your Throw

Weapon skill together with a Hard Hit special power to take out the orc shaman at range. This means by the time the throng of axemen reach you, they're shorn of their magical support. Using the game's combo system, spells, attacks and special skills can be mapped on to a single interface button, enabling you to unleash a deadly mix of abilities with one trusty click. This means a wizard can spit fireballs at the same time as firing arrows from his crossbow in a deadly hail of magical and conventional attacks.

So far, we're having fun with the near-complete code



Do you like gladiator films, Timmy? How about *Diablo* clones?



You can zoom in close to the action – but it's not much use. It's really pelting it down out there.



we've got, even if it does feel a tad familiar. At best, *Sacred* is going to be a refreshing addition to a well-trodden genre; at worst, a derivative trawl down memory lane – only time will tell. That, and our review next issue. **EW**

CLASS ACTION

SACRED PLAYS TOTALLY DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON YOUR CHARACTER CLASS. SO WHAT ARE YOUR CHOICES?

You can ruin a game like this if you choose the wrong character class at the outset. If you're not keen on relentlessly hacking opponents limb-from-limb with a battleaxe, then don't go for the Gladiator. And if you don't appreciate having to sit back, always relying on your bow, don't select the Wood Elf.

There are six characters in all, each with a whole bunch of unique powers and abilities. As well as the two already mentioned, there's the sword-wielding, magic-using Battlemage, the angelic Seraphim and the ninja-like Dark Elf. But our favourite has to be the Vampiress – by day a charismatic knight, by night a bloodthirsty countess of the undead. True to *Hammer House Of Horror* form, when she's in bloodsucking manifestation, she can summon wolves to aid her and suck the life out of enemies with her cruel Blood Bite ability. A whole lot of fun.



REVIEWS

THE DEFINITIVE LOWDOWN ON ALL THE LATEST PC GAMES

CALM AFTER THE STORM



■ SENIOR REVIEWS ED Martin Korda

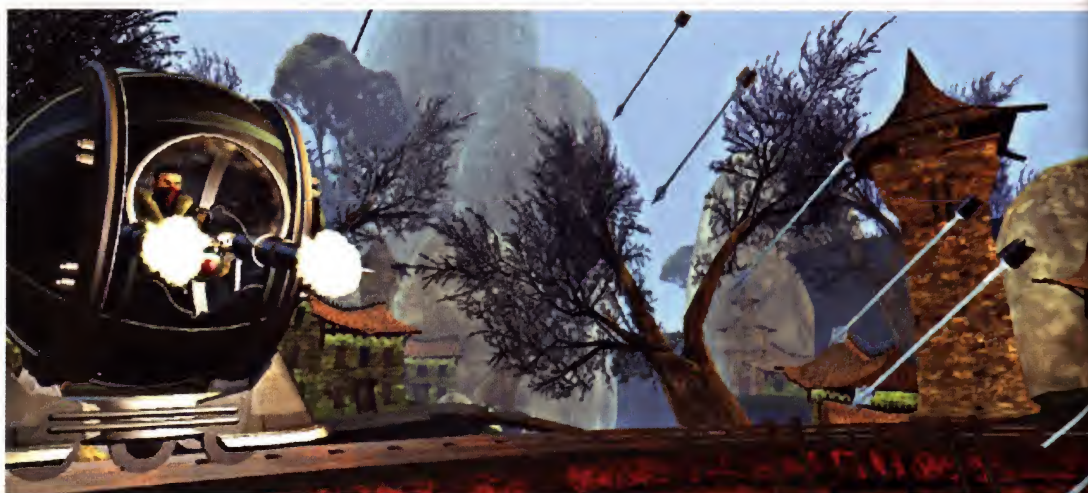
▲ Well it had to happen, didn't it? After four review-packed issues, it was only going to be a matter of time till the PC games market slowed its frenetic pace to take stock and catch its breath. And wouldn't you know it? That's exactly what's happened.

Things were looking pretty ropey after some frantic calls to every publisher on the planet uncovered a grand total of not very many games. Thankfully, amongst those there were still more than enough worth writing home about, and after we'd done that, we set about writing the reviews.

Steve O'Hagan sunk his teeth into *Armed And Dangerous* (page 62), and nearly got into a fight over the score with 'Second Opinion' Anthony Holden. This review is a prime example of why we've been running more Second Opinions than ever over the past six months, in order to give you, the reader, a more balanced opinion of what you'll be getting for your buck. Or pound, if you prefer.

In between eyeballing O'Hagan, Ant kept himself busy with our second big game of the month, *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* (page 66). Being a long-term fan of the *Legacy Of Kain* series, he was the natural choice to review this latest instalment. The fact that he was ready to pounce like a coiled spring thanks to O'Hagan, and had threatened to bleed me like a pig if I didn't give him the game had no impact on my decision whatsoever. Honest.

We've also got wacky racers *Crazy Taxi 3* (page 72) and *TrackMania* (page 76), while the RPG fraternity will no doubt be salivating like starved dogs in a meat factory at the prospect of playing the second *Neverwinter Nights* expansion pack, *Hordes Of The Underdark* (page 75). See, there may only be a few games this month, but there's a lotta fun to be had nonetheless.



The funniest shooter of all time – or a groan a minute? Find out on page 62.

THE ZONE SCORING SYSTEM

Some people (mainly games publishers) say that our scoring system is harsh. It's not. It's honest and built around the seemingly outdated idea that 50 per cent is an average score. Likewise, 70 per cent is a good score, anything above 80 per cent is excellent, and 90 per cent and above is a Classic (see below). Talking of Classic awards, don't expect to see one every issue as we don't chuck them around like confetti.

OUR REVIEWERS

We think our reviewers are the best in the business. Each one is a specialist in numerous genres and will have played every major release, so no game is judged in isolation. We also make sure the right game gets

reviewed by the right person, which means you won't see Steve Hill reviewing an RPG and we won't let Rhianna loose on *FIFA Football 2003*. You can have your say on the games and our reviews as well. If you have a comment to make, please email your views to letters@pczone.co.uk and entitle your email 'Feedback'.

ONLINE REVIEWS AND REVIEW UPDATES

We review a lot of games before they go on sale, and if there are no public servers running before we go to print, we won't second-guess how the game's going to play online. Instead, you'll find dedicated online reviews of all the major releases in our regular Update section. This is also the place where we take a fresh look at games we think have changed significantly – as is the case with persistent online games or through major patch releases.

OUR PCS

We test games on a variety of systems so we can report how they perform in the real world. All our reviewed games are played on the manufacturer's minimum specification, as well as our own top-end rig – the Area-51 from Alienware (below).



Only games that score 90 per cent or more receive the coveted Classic award. The best of the best.



The second tier award for games scoring between 80 and 89 per cent. Essential purchases.

MEET THE TEAM



What are you currently playing?
What do you see in this ink blot?



DAVE WOODS

Unreal II XMP and *Armed And Dangerous*

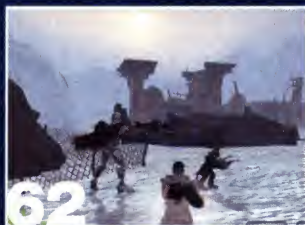
A really sad gingerbread man



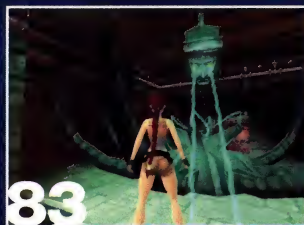
JAMIE SEFTON

Halo multiplayer and *Painkiller* preview code

Jordan being sick



62 ARMED AND DANGEROUS
A laugh a minute?



83 RE-RELEASES
Older games at new prices



85 FEEDBACK
Where you air your opinions



86 REALITY CHECK
Tennis games vs real tennis

DEFINITIVE REVIEWS

- 62 **ARMED AND DANGEROUS**
- 66 **LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE**
- 70 **IN MEMORIAM**
- 72 **CRAZY TAXI 3**
- 75 **NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK**
- 76 **TRACKMANIA**
- 79 **ANITO: DEFEND A LAND ENRAGED**
- 79 **CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH**
- 80 **HOT WHEELS: HIGHWAY 35 WORLD RACE**
- 80 **BLADE & SWORD**
- 81 **VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA**
- 81 **DEAD TO RIGHTS**
- 83 **RE-RELEASES**
TOMB RAIDER: CHRONICLES, SEA DOGS AND OFFROAD
GET A BUDGET RELEASE

- 85 **FEEDBACK**
YOUR VIEWS, REVIEWS AND OPINIONS ON THE LATEST GAMES

- 86 **REALITY CHECK**
WE COMPARE REAL-LIFE TENNIS TO TENNIS GAMES.
STEVE HILL TO SERVE



66



72



75



MARTIN KORDA

Champ Man 03/04 and
Painkiller preview code

A sad ape with a tap on its
head about to be squashed by
a crane



ANTHONY HOLDEN

Max Payne 2 and Halo
multiplayer

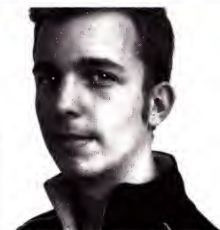
A midget wearing a kagoule
riding a bicycle through a
banana hailstorm



PAUL PRESLEY

X-2 The Threat and Anarchy
Online: Shadowlands

Plate IX in the advanced
interpretation of the
Hermann Rorschach test



WILL PORTER

Halo, Postal 2 and Painkiller
preview code

A fat man with a moustache
offering me sweets



STEVE O'HAGAN

Combat Mission: Afrika Korps
preview code

Saddam's WMD



WILL SARGENT

Deus Ex and Need For
Speed: Underground

Jordan. Lactating



Is it cold in this turret, or is it just me?

ARMED AND DANGEROUS

£39.99 | Pub: Activision | Dev: Planet Moon Studios / LucasArts | ETA: Feb 20 | www.lucasarts.com/products/armedanddangerous

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card **DESIRES** P4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

A comedy shoot 'em up from the Lucas stable? Will it be as laughable as *Phantom Menace* or *Clone Wars*, asks Steve O'Hagan?

INPERSPECTIVE

GIANTS: CITIZEN KABUTO
ISSUE 95, SCORE 85%

A bit cheeky chucking in a game by the same developer here, but considering this too was a humorous 3D actioner (though with interesting RTS and RPG aspects) the two deserve comparison. And while this forerunner no longer looks half as good, we reckon it plays just as well.

GRIM FANDANGO

ISSUE 71, SCORE 90%

Another from the LucasArts ranch. While this point-and-clicker sacrifices 'action' for 'adventure', it encapsulates everything that was good about LucasArts titles from *Monkey Island* onwards – a brilliant story with proper humour told through a game that's highly addictive to boot.

YOU AND your two companions stand in the surrounds of a peaceful, wood-built village, sited in a peaceful forest grove. Fronds of light filter through swaying foliage and bleating lambs gnaw at bristling grass. Birds settle on boughs, spring voices a-twitter.

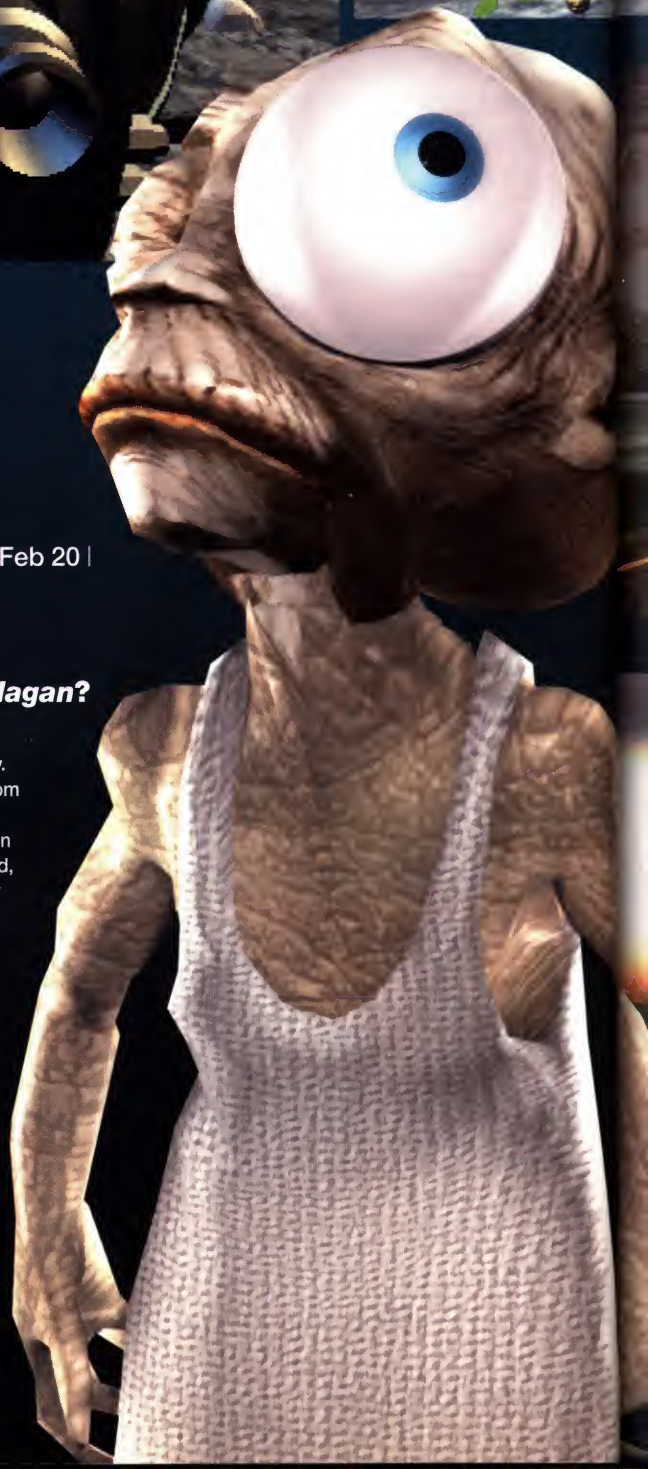
But no, what's this coming to spoil this serene scene? A platoon of soldiers, half-man, half-animal, with evil intent in their eyes.

Retreating for cover as bullets zing about you, your finger alights upon your trigger. You press hard, releasing a slug of metal the size of a rugby ball which plops from the barrel into

the earth, sinking immediately. A second later, a few yards from the point of impact, the cruel curve of a shark's fin pierces the ground, ploughing directly for your enemies.

Panicking, they redirect their fire towards the subterranean predator. But it's too late. Bursting

from beneath the feet of its first target, the earth-surfing Jaws savages the bad guy, shaking his broken body like a baby's rattle. His comrades scream widely, the noise curtailed by a devastatingly well-placed salvo from your Vindaloo rocket launcher. Peace returns, especially to the





Much of the terrain is destructible.



The fire from the Grunts' machine gun emplacements can be dangerous.



Bringing down an enemy missile tower gets you a nice explosion.

sheep, now at eternal rest, caught in the conflagration caused by your curry cannon.

FIRE AWAY

Armed And Dangerous isn't your average shooter. There isn't a team of US special-forces to lead, or an arsenal of real-life weapons to master and a savage Islamic terrorist plot to foil. Instead, we get characters with comedic accents, weapons that could only be the product of a link-up between Coco the Clown and Heckler & Koch, and a pantomime evil king to overthrow. It's a sort of *Shrek* with guns, Monty 'Colt' Python, if you like.

Gameplay-wise, *A&D* is a 3D, third-person shooter – an 'action-actioner' in the words of the creators (Planet Moon Studios, the brains behind the fondly remembered *Giants: Citizen Kabuto*). And as you may have guessed, the tone of the action goes way beyond tongue in cheek, all the way to out-and-out comedy. This is true from the cut-scenes that punctuate the missions, to the comments and asides of your companions, to the nature of much of the weaponry. The designers beavering away for the fabled LucasArts have obviously been busy fashioning a game that'll have you laughing

GAME FOR A LAUGH



ARMED AND DANGEROUS ONLY MANAGES TO RAISE THE ODD LAUGH. THE QUESTION IS: ARE GAGS EVER ANY GOOD IN GAMES?

Humour, like sex, is something that videogames have rarely successfully pulled off. There are exceptions, of course: *GTA III* and *Vice City*'s radio stations are full of damn funny banter, *Duke Nukem* is legendary and *Grim Fandango* has a knowing line in highbrow hilarity – but generally, it's fairly poor if we're honest with ourselves. There are hidden moments of mirth in most games, but it's the ones that set out to be funny that often aren't. Here's a list of a few of the games we reckon would get even the doourest of curmudgeon giggling.



GTA: VICE CITY

The horrendous everyday carnage of the game itself was ripe for sick humour (running over grannies and that sort of thing), but the real genius laughs are found in the radio stations.

With the kind of scripting usually reserved for award-winning BBC2 TV comedies, this is as funny as games get.



DUKE NUKEM 3D

OK, so it's about as mature as *Teletubbies*, but the humour in *Duke 3D* was enough to have us pissing ourselves. The potty-mouthed, ultra-sexist hard man was the freshest, funniest thing in gaming all those years back. We say again, when the hell will *Duke Nukem Forever* be finished?



GRIM FANDANGO

Still riding high in our Action/Adventure category of our A-List, *Grim Fandango* featured some of the finest characterisation of any game ever, with a fantastic script and hilarious interaction between the characters. To this day, few other games have managed to match its sheer comic brilliance.



JAGGED ALLIANCE 2

A turn-based strategy game with laughs? Oh yes. Almost every one of the many mercenaries you could hire for your team came complete with comedy accent and some kind of terminal social inadequacy they were liable to display in the heat of battle. We laughed.



A gun that fires a man-eating shark. Good comedy?

at your workstations. Or that's what they hope, anyway. Have they succeeded? Partially.

MINERS STRIKE

You play as Roman, the hard-bitten cockney leader of the Lionhearts, a gang of mercenaries and thieves. At your side for much of the action are Jonesy, a cynical, sarcastic Scottish mole-man miner (maybe someone should have told the Americans it's the Welsh who're renowned for being miners called Jones) and Q1-11, an upper-class battle

droid with a penchant for brewing tea. Also appearing is Rexus, the wise old geezer who's the brains behind the whole operation, though you'll only ever really see him in the cut-scenes.

Things begin with the gang setting out to pull off the biggest heist in the history of the land of Milola – stealing the Book of Rule, the most powerful artefact known to mole-man or beast. Soon after, though, Roman and the rest get dragged into a battle for freedom from the yoke of the

"Armed And Dangerous isn't your average shooter. It's sort of *Shrek* with guns, Monty 'Colt' Python, if you like"



Your two buddies do little other than provide comedy value. Up to a point.

"A&D gives you a unique set of weapons designed to create comic carnage. And using them is fun – no doubt about it"

evil King Forge. A cockney leader's work is never done, eh?

FULL THROTTLE

A&D has got its foot firmly on the 'action' pedal. In essence, what you do is traverse each level beating off football stadium-loads of bad guys, using a host of weapons – both bizarre and conventional.

At your side for much of it are your two buddies, Jonesy and Q1-11. Although, with only two commands available ('stay' and 'follow'), they might as well be heavily armed Labradors than intelligent team-mates. No, apart from absorbing enemy fire and giving a little back themselves, these two are more important for the non-stop trickle of one-liners, put-downs, complaints and other such 'side-splitting' commentary. And we'll speak a little more about this constant stream of quips and japes from

the posh droid and the Scottish dwarf cross-breed later.

Armed And Dangerous has been developed as a console and PC game simultaneously, but we recommend playing with a mouse and keyboard. For despite its third-person viewpoint, A&D could just as easily be a first-person shooter, such is the emphasis on non-stop combat. Consequently, the freedom mouse-look gives you is invaluable, as there will be enemies coming at you from all directions, and then some.

The most basic of the 21 missions involve you simply getting from A to B. Navigation is never a problem, with little in the way of exploring to be done. Neither will puzzles bar your way, as the only riddling that needs doing is riddling your many opponents' bodies with bullets.

Though they're extremely multitudinous, the bad guys

don't come in that many shapes and sizes, with the bog-standard Grunt (a half-man, half-beast soldier armed with a bow or a rifle) being your chief opponent right to the end of the game. Backing these humble foot soldiers up are their officers (armed with sub-machine guns and sometimes rocket launchers or jet-packs), battle droids, teleporting priests, gun emplacements and the occasional species of aggressive wildlife.

ANAL PROBE

There's no doubt that, with its arcade-like momentum, this is not the kind of game where you should get anal about the enemy AI. Which is a good job, because over and above some primitive reactions such as running to man vacant gun emplacements, or diving away from grenades, the average Grunt in A&D displays the brain power of the side of him which is beast, not man.

Instead, what you tend to be confronted with are human wave tactics. At your disposal to tackle this constant, malignant flow is a truly unique set of weapons (though the



Want all-out action? You got it.



Don't shoot – they drop useful gubbins in the turret missions.



Those sheep are entirely innocent.

Worms games must take some credit for inspiration), designed to create comic carnage. And using them is fun – no doubt about it. Along with the aforementioned Land Shark gun and Vindaloo launcher, we also find the Topsy-Turvy bomb (which sends nearby targets flying into the air before crashing back down again), and the world's smallest black hole which sucks enemies into its vortex.

With its ceaseless gunfire and designed-to-be-spectacular stream of explosions, *Armed And Dangerous* is a lively looking game. Much of what you see, from barrels to trees to buildings can be destroyed, and no doubt you'll oblige in this task. Okay, so it's never going to win awards for its looks, but the game is nice and smooth (vital for an actioner of this pace), with a solid feel to its environments.

WALKTHROUGH →

READY TO RUMBLE?

Forget your Shark guns and curry-flavoured missiles: getting started in A&D means you have to master the more mundane firepower of the rifle, machine gun and sticky bomb...



1 The rifle is the first gun you get. It's not so great up close as it's not fast-firing, but it's decent at middle distance. Use it to target any barrels you see up ahead with Grunts clustered around.



2 The machine gun is a mainstay of the whole game. Hold fire down for longer than a second and your fire becomes wild. Which is no problem if your target is close up – just hold down fire till they drop.



3 Any further away and you need to continually tap the mouse button to fire accurate single rounds and short bursts. Continually strafe left and right while doing this if other bad dudes are firing at you.



4 The sticky bomb is a great way to split up a big group of enemies. Throw them liberally – especially at the start of fire-fights when the Grunts are grouped – as dead enemies often drop them as pick-ups.

LAND AND FREEDOM

There are five distinct landscapes to fight over, ranging from icy wastelands, to rocky mountain regions, to smoke-shrouded industrial regions. These go together to create a semi-believable setting for the crazed combat, in a cartoony kind of way.

The designs of the houses, forts, factories and castles are all nice, with a quasi-industrial revolution feel to everything. Certain features catch the eye, such as the dense foliage, the wintry trees and the general draw distance – which in some



The Vindaloo launcher hits multiple targets at once.

levels allows for some extreme range sniper combat.

HOME ALONE

Apart from the 'get to the end of the level' missions, there are a handful of other tasks you have to carry out. The most common early on is locating villagers and returning them to their homes (ring any bells, *Giants* fans)? The emphasis here is no less on non-stop blasting, only with the small, added headache of dragging the local village idiot back to his hovel.

Every so often, gameplay swaps for a level, putting you in the turret of a gun fighting off the massed ranks of the King's armies. With twin machine guns and a rocket launcher,

you have to blast hundreds of swarming troops before they can scale your walls. The joy of obliterating huge amounts of Grunts is sure to warm anyone's heart. That said, apart from the surrounding landscape, these levels are exactly the same each time and incredibly easy.

What's more, when you've only got 21 levels in the first place, the fact that five or so are these turret missions means there's not a hell of a lot of game for your buck. There is replay value there, as locating

secret tokens can unlock cheat modes and the occasional new level. But in the final

reckoning, we're looking at a paltry five or six hours play here – and no multiplayer for afters.

NO LAUGHING MATTER

At the end of the day, putting humour near the top of the list of your game's selling points is a risky business. It's not as if we all dig through our game collection for a good laugh when *The Office* and *Phoenix Nights* have finished. But *Armed And Dangerous* does just that, hoping that there are enough of us out there looking for an antidote to the uncountable number of po-faced RPGs, stern-looking shooters and earnest simulations. Me?

I remain unconvinced. A game's first priority is to entertain in an interactive manner. If there's humour, we want to be a part of it.

But to be honest, the comedy value of the weapons in *A&D* is all



MISSED OPPORTUNITY (O)



Turret missions need more freedom.

WHO LEFT THE SUPERGLUE IN MY TURRET?

It would've been easy to say the missed opportunity here was "some good gags", but that would be churlish. *A&D* does have its moments. Instead, we'd like to point to the turret missions. Now, these are a good laugh, but a) they're the same, bar the landscape; b) they're criminally easy; and c) they don't integrate into the main game at all. Had the developers made more of these fun though facile moments, possibly getting you to jump in and out of the turrets mid-mission, we'd have been happier. For what it's worth.

but lost in the fury of the action. The Shark gun is largely useless, the Vindaloo launcher looks like any other rocket launcher, and the real workhorses of the game are the humble and humourless machine gun, sniper rifle and sticky bombs.

Which is not to say the action isn't fun – it just isn't particularly funny. Light-

hearted, yes. Hilarious, no. When Q1-11 offers you a cuppa in the heat of battle for the 10th time, or when Jonesy starts singing Scottish songs again, the joke has already worn a bit thin. Regardless, most of your companions' in-game mutterings are drowned out by the rattle of gunfire, and your brow is too furrowed in concentration staying alive to register the ones that aren't.

So take away the humour and what you're left with is a simple, undemanding and fast-paced shooter that veers from the gently amusing to a whole lot of fun. But when the fun cruelly comes to an end after a little over five or six hours, what are you left with? The humour. And since the gags wear thin quicker than the knees on Dennis the Menace's jeans, for laughs, give us *Phoenix Nights* or *The Office* any day. **PC**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Non-stop action
- ✓ Weapons unlike any others
- ✓ Quite amusing
- ✗ Very short
- ✗ Gags wear thin
- ✗ One dimensional (not literally)

77

Good, dumb fun
– for a while



SECOND OPINION

ANTHONY HOLDEN

Well, Steve can go to hell, because I like this game lots. The gameplay's simple – shoot anything that moves with lots of silly weapons – but the execution and exuberance make it hard not to like. Maybe Steve's pissed off because the game has a few dodgy Welsh accents (he's from the Valleys).

Admittedly, the game has its flaws. The levels are inconsistent, some of them large, open and beautifully imagined, others annoyingly linear and simple. The humour too is hit-and-miss, but there are some genuinely funny bits, whatever Steve 'I hate laughter' O'Hagan thinks.

In fact, if you like to make things blow up and you don't mind a bit of Pythonesque wackiness, you'll spend every minute of this game with a big smile on your face. Unless you're a Welshman.



More bounce to the ounce: the mid-air juggling combos are the game's best feature.

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

■ £29.99 | Pub: Eidos | Dev: Crystal Dynamics | ETA: February 6 | www.legacyofkain.com

REQUIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB DirectX 9 compatible 3D Card

DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB DirectX 9 compatible 3D Card and a gamepad with an analogue stick

The streets will run red as **Anthony Holden** chews his way through another bloodthirsty reave 'em up

IN PERSPECTIVE

TOMB RAIDER: THE ANGEL OF DARKNESS
Reviewed Issue 132, Score 68%

Though not as disastrous as the backlash may have suggested, Lara's latest effort is still a bit of a turkey. Unfinished, inconsistent and riddled with bugs, it nonetheless offers a more sedate alternative to the likes of *Legacy Of Kain*, with much bigger breasts.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
Reviewed Issue 136, Score 84%

For a less visceral and violent action-adventure outing, we'd be remiss not to urge you in the direction of *The Sands Of Time*. With its elegant mixture of agility, puzzle-solving and nifty time tampering, this little gem is truly a triumph.

FIG ROLLS. They're just not the same as they used to be. I don't know if you've tried one lately, but I swear they used to be a lot figgier. Wagon Wheels too – I mean what the hell is up with the jam-to-biscuit ratio in the contemporary Wagon Wheel? Don't get me wrong, I still love the concept, but it's been watered down and made rubbish by mean-spirited, penny-pinching, bureaucratic minions of Satan.

It's a similar story with *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance*. Big fan of the concept. Loved *Soul Reaver 2*. Not that fussed with *Blood Omen*, but I loved *Soul Reaver 2*. And upon unwrapping *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* and taking the first nibble, I was delighted at

what I found. What a gorgeous, brilliantly conceived addition to the series. Not only has the combat system been seriously beefed up and supplemented by cool telekinetic powers, but you get to play as both Raziel and Kain, the star-crossed

however, we should do the polite thing and make some introductions. The *Legacy Of Kain* series, started way back in 1996 with the original *Blood Omen*, is a double-stranded action-adventure epic that's unfurled gradually to reveal a

“The combat system has been beefed up and supplemented with cool telekinetic powers”

protagonists of the two-pronged series. Somehow though, the further I chewed into the game the more I saw the terrible truth. They've skimmed on the figs.


Before we get too carried away with the snack metaphors

dense and remarkably confusing vampiric storyline. The two stars of the series are Kain, blood-sucking demi-god and possible saviour of Nosgoth; and Raziel, a fallen vampire reduced to sucking souls and living with one

foot in the Spectral realm. He might also be the saviour of Nosgoth and/or the vampire race, though he may also have been sent to destroy it, and the two of them may or may not be out to kill each other. Like I say, it's all a bit complicated.

For the sake of brevity, let's just say it's *Zelda* for goths. Instead of magical suits you've got magical swords, instead of heart containers you've got ancient rune-stones and instead of ocarinas you've got, I don't know, Fields Of The Nephilim.

New game areas open up as you imbue your Reaver with new powers, like the Earth element that lets you walk underwater, the Fire element that lets you light torches and the Darkness



The effects and animations are simply lovely.

When rave fashions go too far...

You can't pick up enemies' weapons now, so it's all about the Reaver.

LEGACY OF NORKS

GOOD OMENS FOR TOMB RAIDER 7...

The Crystal Dynamics team has every right to feel smug at the moment. From humble beginnings, it's managed to carve out quite a name for itself, building up the *Legacy Of Kain* series into a highly respectable little empire.

Meanwhile, it's also been forced to play second-fiddle to Eidos' flagship action-adventure franchise, despite the fact that Raziel and Kain have been running rings

around Lara for years. Now, of course, the tables have turned. Crystal Dynamics has been handed the *Tomb Raider* licence to work its magic on, and though we can't decide if it's sweet justice or the most back-handed compliment ever, we can't think of a better outfit to revive the top-heavy tomb robber.

So far, we've yet to hear anything on the *Tomb Raider 7* project. But if *Defiance* is any

indication – at least in terms of technology – things are looking bright. The game runs incredibly smoothly, the animations are superb, the visual effects stunning and the engine's clearly been designed with high-res PC specs in mind. A bit of Crystal Dynamics' customary design flair and another crap movie tie-in and Lara will be back on top of the pile in no time at all. If you still care.

element that lets you paint your walls black and wallow in self-pity. Or something.

The difference is, there's a lot more fighting – and with the crucial need to suck blood or souls to top up your health, it's also a lot more brutal. There's a lot more bombastic, over-dramatic speechifying too, but it's done with enough style that you'll soon be pontificating with the best of them.

BLOOD ON THE CARPET

Legacy Of Kain: Defiance follows the formula set by the previous games meticulously. The two strands of the series finally merge here, and you also finally get some plot resolution (presumably making this the last

of the line).

Otherwise, it's business as usual – killing lots of humans, solving puzzles and exploring spooky old mansions and churches.

The biggest change is in the combat system, which drops the rudimentary Z-lock hacking of *Soul Reaver 2* for a fully-fledged 3D fighting dynamic more in the vein of Capcom's *Devil May Cry*.

Combos are the order of the day, with new special moves unlocking as you accrue experience. At the outset, these are simple rapid sword attacks, but after a couple of hours the mid-air juggling combos emerge, and they're nothing short of magnificent. Sweep an

opponent into the sky with an upward slash, then leap to meet him in mid-air, bouncing him like a basketball once or twice before launching a dazzling flurry of pyrotechnic attacks. Unless you're a butler to the royal palace, it's probably the most fun you'll have all day.

The other key addition is telekinetic powers. Open to both

Raziel and Kain, these handy psychic abilities endow you with a range of Jedi-like powers, including the old 'grip and drop off the side of a cliff' move, plus the superb ability to pick someone up and impale them on the nearest wall-spike. With this feature in place, the combat is without doubt the game's best feature.

TEMPLES OF DOOM

Our heroes Kain and Raziel are played in alternating chapters, and while they do offer some distinct gameplay features, they're far too similar overall. Both can climb the same surfaces, float on their wings/cape, unleash the same combos and flip the same switches. Kain's sections are a



Eat something, you're skin and bone.

bit more action-focused, while Raziel has a few more puzzles to solve, but these guys are far more Ken and Ryu than Sonic and Knuckles.

And this is where we start to run out of figs. Not only is the gameplay between Kain and Raziel remarkably similar, they even go to the same locations, the excuse being that they're separated by 500 years and the textures have changed a bit. Worse still (by about a million times), is the fact that you have to visit the exact same bloody temple at least ten times



That'll give you a splitting headache. Ho ho...

during the course of the game, solving its baffling 'mysteries' every time. Of course, it's not the same temple – one is the 'Fire' temple, one the 'Light' temple and so forth – but they're almost completely indistinguishable, the developers having simply moved rocks and changed the patterns on the walls to try and fool us.

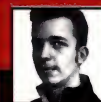
The puzzle-solving in the game is likewise disappointing. Apart from the fact that you have to solve ten near-identical temple sections, the whole puzzle system feels dumbed down compared to *Soul Reaver 2*. Raziel's spectral shift ability isn't used half as well as it once was, and becomes little more than a tiresome curse as you trek around looking for a place to shift back to

material form. And since there's no map or compass in the game, you're also going to get lost a lot – especially if you leave the game and come back after a few forgetful days.

LOK:D AFTER DARK

Clearly, there's a whiff of something sinister here. Despite its level of polish, *LOK: Defiance* seems to have been rushed to market, with a massive cut-and-paste job done to hide a lack of content. The game would have

benefited from being either five hours shorter or five environments richer – in the



SECOND OPINION

WILL PORTER

My first impressions of *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* were hugely positive. After all, how can you not warm to a game in which you can juggle vampire hunters with your sword, telekinetically blast them into a fire and then swallow the soul out of their burning body?

But after a few hours of play, you start to realise that there isn't a huge amount of substance behind the fighting. Temple merges into graveyard, graveyard merges into temple, and every level feels like the one before it. Even Kain and Raziel feel the same in combat, with only a couple of moves and skills to differentiate between them. The whole thing just feels as if it's on an endless road to the same locations, again and again and again.

It isn't a bad game. It plays well and it looks nice enough, but far too much of it is little more than time-filling fluff. Which is a shame.

latter case, it would have easily scored in the mid-80s. There's nothing wrong with the game mechanics either, apart from a troublesome 'cinematic' camera perhaps, and it's a real shame to see such a fun game reduced to tedium through sheer repetition.

The worst thing is, the problems faced by *Legacy Of Kain: Defiance* are in some ways the problems of the whole games industry. (Hell, the whole of society if you want to get down to it.) There's too much pressure to deliver a finished game regardless of content and quality, and it leads to cutting corners and mediocre products. It doesn't make us happy in the slightest, but, hey, we still eat Fig Rolls, so who's the sucker? [X]

MISSED OPPORTUNITY



"You're nothing but a pawn in my sick little game."

WE WANNA BE FREE! TO DO WHAT WE WANNA DO!

There are missed opportunities and there are just plain stupid things – stuff that the developers clearly wouldn't have put in the game if they weren't having their arms twisted by money-grabbing corporate whores. Most of the problems with *Defiance*, including the woeful amount of repetition, I put in the latter camp.

To find the real missed opportunity, you need to look at the title of the game itself. It's called *Defiance* because it concerns the efforts of Kain and Raziel to defy fate, to cut the strings of their puppet-masters and piss in the smug face of destiny. Given this premise, it seems only fair and natural to extend the same privilege to us, the player-heroes, giving us some freedom to choose between branching plotlines and outcomes. Instead, the game is relentlessly linear, and the only possible defiance left to us is to turn it off and play something else instead.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Smooth, detailed and pleasing to behold
- ✓ Satisfying new combat system
- ✓ Cool telekinetic powers
- ✗ Painfully repetitive puzzles and environments
- ✗ Way too easy to get lost

79

Almost great but marred by repetition

THERE'S NO KILL LIKE OVERKILL.



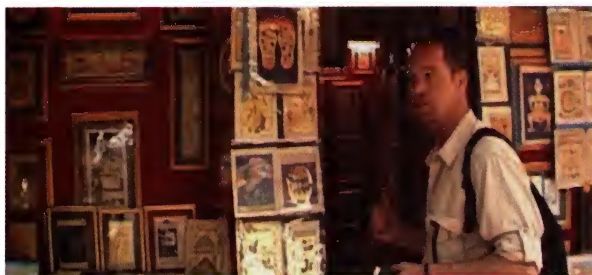
Meet the Lionhearts. A smack-talking rag-tag band of rebels bound on an impossible quest. With an arsenal of outrageous weapons, they're destined for victory in 12,000 bullets or less. If they can make it through an army of psychotic robots and wall-smashing Goliaths, they just might save the world...if they don't burn it down first.



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armed.lucasarts.com

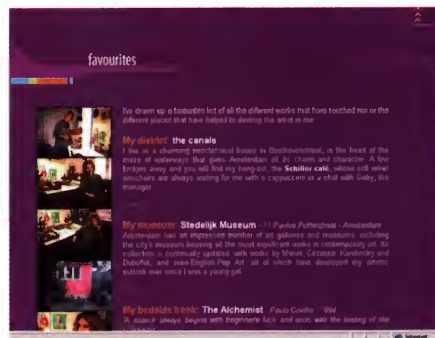




Jack is very fond of filming Karen, the dirty perv!



Some puzzles you just won't be able to complete without trawling the Net.



The website of one of the missing researchers. Sometimes pictures direct you to a location.



IN MEMORIAM

■ £29.99 | Pub: Ubisoft | Dev: Lexis Numérique | ETA: Out Now |
www.ubi.com/uk/games/inmemoriam/

REQUIRES PIII 333MHz, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES PIII 500, 256MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

The nearest Rhianna Pratchett ever got to a serial killer was an out-of-date box of Coco Pops

IT'S VERY reassuring when a game like *In Memoriam* comes along, because it shows that some developers are genuinely forward-thinking in their outlook, trying to find ways of injecting new life into the floundering genre of puzzle-lead adventure games. It's safe to say that this game isn't like anything you will have played before.

The story revolves around the disappearance of two

researchers, Jack Lorski and Karen Gijman, who have vanished while investigating an old murder case. The police subsequently receive a strange black disc entitled 'In Memoriam', from a serial killer who dubs himself the Phoenix and claims to have kidnapped the researchers. The disc is full of lots of little puzzle games that perplex the authorities so much they open up the case to the general public, and start sending copies of the disc out.

footage. Some of the puzzles take the form of arcade-style games that just need a bit of mouse dexterity to complete, but the more interesting ones actually require you to go onto the Internet and search for relevant webpages.

The immediate problem is that walkthroughs and help forums have sprung up since the release of the game, and it's all too tempting to use them. But curb your desire to cheat, because actually doing the work and finding the answers yourself is ultimately far more satisfying.

If it all sounds a bit daunting, the game actually provides its

own kind of help along the way. As you progress, you'll be sent in-game emails from fictional players every now and then. They're also trying to solve the riddles, and will provide you with bits and pieces from their research. You'll also hear from the SKL Network (Jack's employer), and, as you near the end of the game, you'll even start to get emails from the serial killer himself.

This blurring of reality and fiction adds to the atmosphere and appeal of *In Memoriam*. Instead of just moving crates or clicking on certain objects it actually feels like you've put genuine brainpower into solving the game. Ultimately, as with many puzzle games, there's little replayability at all, but the experience of playing such a clever title that literally thinks outside the box more than makes up for that. **PC**

IN PERSPECTIVE

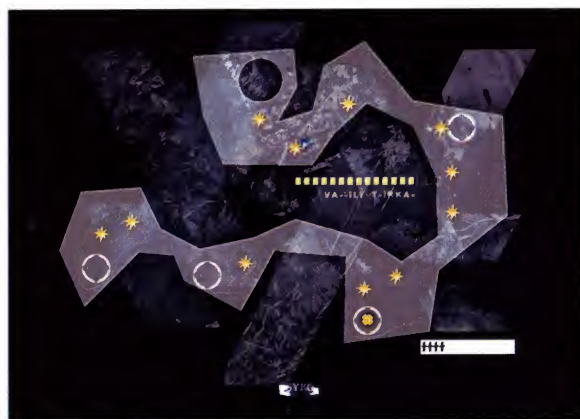
URU: AGES BEYOND MYST
 Reviewed Issue 138, Score 71%
 A technological leap forward for the *Myst* series, but still a game very much aimed at the fans of the series with mind-bending puzzles set amid beautiful alien landscapes.

SYBERIA
 Reviewed Issue 121, Score 42%
 A classic, static-backdrop adventure with a quirky storyline and a few taxing puzzles, but unfortunately it doesn't progress the genre in the way that *In Memoriam* and *Uru* do.

RIDDLE ME THIS, RIDDLE ME THAT

The game is like a strange combination of movies *The Blair Witch Project* and *Fear.com* – working as both a history research project and a traditional puzzle game with bits of video diary thrown in. As you begin to solve the Phoenix's creepy, atmospheric mini-games, so little bits and pieces of Jack and Karen's story are revealed to you through home movie-style

“You'll even get emails from the serial killer himself”



There are lots of mini-games that need to be completed.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Original idea
- ✓ Blends reality and fiction
- ✓ Atmospheric
- ✗ No replayability

81

An intriguing creepshow



X²

THE THREAT

'21st Century Elite'
92% **PCZONE**



87% **PCGAMER**



TRADE FIGHT BUILD THINK

The ultimate test of combat, tactical, navigational & entrepreneurial skills, X² The Threat is a space simulation of breathtaking depth & scope. Explore a vast, dynamic universe, populated with thousands of spacecraft, stations & satellites. Build a lucrative empire by trading in a huge variety of goods. Form fleets of spacecraft, limited only by what you can afford and fight gripping battles from the cockpit, gunner's seat or remotely from a-far. X² The Threat encompasses an expertly woven plot, which seamlessly integrates with the open-ended game play. A trail of intriguing characters leads to the discovery of dark secrets within the 'X' Universe as a sinister new threat to its very existence emerges. Can you marshal its salvation?

PC CD

EGOSOFT



DEEP SILVER



Crazy Drift and scare your passengers witless. Tee hee.

CRAZY TAXI 3

■ £29.99 | Pub: Empire Interactive | Dev: SEGA / Hitmaker
ETA: Jan 31 | www.empireinteractive.co.uk

REQUIRES PIII 1 GHz, 256MB RAM and a 3D card (limited support – see website) **DESIRES** A GeForce 3 or better (see website)

Will Sargent resets the meter and wipes the back seat clean of sick in preparation for another night shift on the crazy streets of America

DON'T YOU just love ads which scream 'Exclusively for Xbox', and 'Only on Gamecube'? How we laugh as the mighty PC's gnarled hands scoops up any game it chooses, to run at ridiculously improved resolutions and texture depths its maker can only dream of.

And such is the case with *Crazy Taxi 3*, a game 'exclusively

for Xbox' which is also mysteriously available on the most multi-faceted gaming platform in the universe. Life's good when you can hop from *Everquest* to Microsoft *Flight Sim*, then back to an arcade classic at the click of a mouse, isn't it?

KER-RAZY CABINETS

You probably know that *Crazy Taxi* started out as an eardrum-perforating, retina-searing arcade cabinet. Sega's proven formula of explosive visuals married to fun periphery – steering wheel and gear lever to select *Crazy* moves – was designed to blow your senses for a pound, in 30-second bursts, or two minutes max if you were any good.

A pixel-perfect arcade conversion arrived on PC via the ill-fated Dreamcast toy in 2000, followed by *Crazy Taxi 2*, a competent if unambitious follow-

up from Sega's Hitmaker team, offering an approximation of New York along with the original San Francisco-styled level. The second game introduced the Crazy Hop move, which catapults cabs 20ft or more into the air.

The third incarnation of *Crazy Taxi* follows the formula, packing

all previous content along with one whole new course, the Las Vegas-inspired Glitter Oasis. There are four new drivers (12 in total), and 25 'Crazy X' mini-challenge stages. The new game is identical to its predecessors, in that you pick up and drop off as many

passengers as fast as possible, in standard (arcade), three, five or ten-minute bursts.

WE WANT MORE!

"Just one new course!" you protest. Well, pull over here and stop that meter ticking for a second, because when we say 'one new course', we're not simply talking a teeny-tiny extra level of glitchy, overlapping polygons here.

No siree. This is a Sega game, where 'one new course' means a hand-crafted and painfully detailed toy shop of fantasy architecture, soaked in prismatic lighting, with short cuts and unlockable secrets at every turn. Put it this way, more work will have gone into designing

INPERSPECTIVE

MIDTOWN MADNESS 2

Reviewed Issue 96, Score 84%

Doesn't have Sega's arcade polish, but offers a neat game of bumper cars in the busy city streets of London and San Francisco.

GRAND THEFT AUTO:

VICE CITY

Reviewed Issue 131, Score 95%

Without doubt, one of the best home videogames ever made. This crim-sim will have you tearing through the streets in all manner of vehicles, gunning down fellow perps to the sounds of '80s classics.



It's not real – let's wreck the place!



She'll be needing a trip to Kwik-Fit after that tyre shredding.

"The Glitter Oasis level is a painfully detailed toy shop of fantasy architecture, soaked in prismatic lighting with short cuts and secrets at every turn"



Who needs a helicopter tour of Vegas when you can do it from the comfort of your own car?

and play-testing the single Glitter Oasis level than Basingstoke's Festival Place Shopping Centre - another good example of ill-fitting polygons.

The new landscape, like its West Coast (San Fran) and Small Apple (New York) counterparts is brimming with detail. A main strip of Vegas-like themed hotels at its centre is linked via a freeway to the miniaturised Grand Canyon and Hoover Dam. Crazy connoisseurs will find plenty of opportunity to 'Hop' between hotels and 'Drift' across the dusty canyon roads.

WHERE TO, BUDDY?

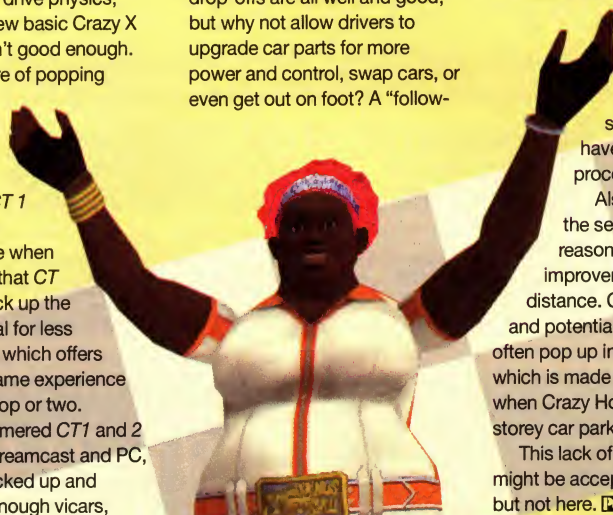
But there's something important missing from this, the third game in the series. Yes, the new Vegas level is splendid, and the graphics for all three stages have been overhauled with reflections, motion blur, night-time driving

and simple flame effects. But the game hasn't really moved up a gear from *Crazy Taxi 2* to justify yet another purchase.

Stuffing in four new cars, with all-too-similar drive physics, along with a few basic Crazy X challenges isn't good enough. (You'll soon tire of popping balloons and jumping logs in arenas nicked from *CT 1* and 2.) This is especially true when you consider that *CT* virgins can pick up the superb original for less than a tenner, which offers virtually the same experience bar a Crazy Hop or two.

If you hammered *CT1* and 2 on both the Dreamcast and PC, you'll have picked up and dropped off enough vicars,

schoolgirls and surf dudes to rival a real-world cabbie (at least in San Francisco), so something new was essential to keep us interested in the trade. Multiple drop-offs are all well and good, but why not allow drivers to upgrade car parts for more power and control, swap cars, or even get out on foot? A "follow-



CRAZY MOVES

HOP, HOP AND AWAY

There's no denying *Crazy Taxi* loses some of its arcade magic running on any home format, including the PC. Replacing the arcade cabinet's gearstick with a couple of wobbly gamepad buttons makes mastery of the 11 Crazy moves far more difficult, but this will come with practice - it's absolutely essential if you're going to unlock the game's full potential. Whereas the *Crazy Dash* and *Crazy Drift* will have your passengers squealing, it's the *Crazy Hop* that reaps rewards - it's possible to shave seconds off any run by leaping across rooftops and cutting corners. In fact, the old West Coast and Small Apple levels have been tweaked to accommodate more jumps. Hoorah.



Just popping into the office, dear. Forgot my suitcase.



Penetrate the flaming rings of joy in this Crazy X mini-game.

that-cab" chase

sequence would have spiced up proceedings too.

Also, this far along the series, we could reasonably expect an improvement in draw distance. Cars, buildings and potential pick-up points often pop up into view too late, which is made all the worse when Crazy Hopping off a multi-storey car park roof at 80mph.

This lack of graphical finesse might be acceptable on Xbox, but not here. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Stunning new Vegas level
- ✓ Night-time and motion blur effects
- ✓ San Fran and NY redesigned to accommodate Crazy Hops
- ✗ No new gameplay enhancements
- ✗ Objects 'pop-up' into view

68

Fun, but too much like its predecessors

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The all-Underdark flaming Hula Hoop contest was a big success.



It's not often you get to experience battles like this.



Beholders and eyeball beasts are some of the new monsters you'll be up against.



The shifter is one of the new character classes in the game.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: HORDES OF THE UNDERDARK



£19.99 | Pub: Atari | Dev: Bioware | ETA: Out Now |
www.neverwinternights.com

REQUIRES PIII 800, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card DESIRES P4 1.4GHz, 512MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Rhianna Pratchett polymorphs into a minotaur and stomps through the second *Neverwinter Nights* expansion pack

BIOWARE has been on fire over the last couple of years. *Neverwinter Nights* topped the charts all over the world, followed by a tasty expansion pack, another blockbuster with

INPERSPECTIVE

DUNGEON SIEGE

Reviewed Issue 114, Score 89% DS goes in for more open-plan, epic scenery and bigger party-based action than *NWN*. It's also quite light on plot, so you only really have to worry about killing and looting.

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS: SHADOWS OF UNDRENTIDE

Reviewed Issue 133, Score 85% Undoubtedly an essential expansion for *NWN*, this has prestige classes and plenty of new tweaks. However, lower level characters mean it's not so full of eye-candy as *HotU*.

Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic and now a second expansion for *NWN: Hordes Of The Underdark*. Just don't get me started on the gorgeous-looking *Jade Empire*, because I'm still sulking and shuffling my feet about the fact that it's only coming out on the Xbox.

TAKE ME HIGHER

Nevertheless, *Hordes Of The Underdark* will be enough to placate many of Bioware's PC fans. It contains a 20-hour-plus single-player campaign, six new prestige classes (dragon disciple, dwarven defender, pale master, champion of Torm, weapon master and shifter), along with the ability to customise characters and weapons.

The main difference between this expansion and *NWN: Shadows Of Undrentide* is that you start as a level 15 character and can progress to the new level cap of 40, gaining a new 'Epic' status along the way. This means you get access to many of the most impressive-looking spells and skills right at the start, so you need a hefty machine to render the impressive fireworks displays that you'll be bombarded with as you cast your devastating incantations.

Getting all the good stuff straight away certainly makes the game feel more exciting, especially as you can adequately challenge the more interesting enemies and even have a hope in hell of taking down a dragon.

FULL VERSION OF
NEVERWINTER
NIGHTS REQUIRED

The campaign itself has a bit more pace than the last expansion too – boasting some attractive cut scenes – and involves you travelling deep into Undermountain to battle some pesky Drow elves who are causing trouble up top.

PARTY TIME

This time you can take two henchmen with you, which gives the whole affair more of a party feel – but it's still not a patch on the party dynamics in *Baldur's Gate II*. Although they're rather static in their animation and still have a tendency to get stuck behind things, the henchmen here are more chatty and keep on giving you their opinions on what's happening, like it or not.

The option of having two henchmen just about makes up for the single-player campaign

not being supported in multiplayer, likely to be a disappointment for some.

However, the focus on the single-player experience, along with Bioware's top-notch level design has created an expansion pack with great detail and atmosphere that's arguably even more immediately immersive than the original game. **PCZ**

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Epic single-player campaign
- ✓ Looks gorgeous
- ✓ Plenty of new content
- ✓ Immersive atmosphere
- ✗ No multiplayer support for main campaign
- ✗ Static character models

86

Lovely stuff



A bit like Alton Towers, only with a more tarnished safety record.

TRACKMANIA

■ £29.99 | Pub: Digital Jesters | Dev: Nadeo | ETA: Out Now | www.trackmania.com

REQUIRES PII 450, 64MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card. DESIRES P4 1GHz, 128MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

To combat road congestion and deathly one-way systems, Will Porter provides a blueprint with more loops and jumps

WHEN I'd finished this review, our reviews editor Martin Korda was a bit puzzled.

"So, let me get this straight," he said. "You describe the graphics as dodgy, the car handling as slightly iffy and the title *TrackMania* as cack-on-a-stick – yet you're somehow happy?" I nodded. "Then why are you crying, young one?" he cooed as he ruffled my hair.

"Because it made my fingers bleed," I replied as I raised the sinister gory stumps that had formed over my wrists. "And now I can't play it anymore."

TrackMania, as football pundits the world over are fond of telling us, is a game of two halves: in one you puzzle and in the other you race. The bastard

offspring of old-skool puzzle game *Pipemania* and any number of racers where you spend more time airborne than is healthy, your primary objective is to get to the finish line as quickly as is humanly possible.

The twist in the game, though, is that in doing so, you must first construct the course with a big bag of track materials provided by your helpful PC. You build the jumps and place the loops to ensure that you get from point A to point B (often by way

of points C through to K) in the fastest possible fashion, even if this means that you're cheating like a bastard.

ROUGH DIAMOND

As noted in my opening ramble, *TrackMania* isn't a hugely polished game, but it's a breath of fresh air to play a game with a half-original concept. It feels (and, critics might add, looks) like the games of my youth (and so the rest of the team's middle-age), when originality sold as



The cars are boring, but the tracks are mental.



You will learn to love this screen.



Hmmm. A loop here, a bend there?



Eat your heart out Dukes of Hazard...

much as generic graphical kiss-kiss-bang-bang.

The second path of straight races aren't quite as much fun, and most of your enjoyment stems from trying to outwit the game in the puzzle sections – but chasing the ghost-car that traces out your earlier runs is a compulsion that rarely fades.

SPLASH THE CASH

The more medals you're awarded, the more cash you have to spend on buying bits of track for your own maniacal designs, which you can then spread all over the internet with joyful abandon. There's a fairly vibrant community online, most of it hailing from *TrackMania*'s gallic homeland.

If you fancy it, you can hook yourself up online and get racing against a host of fellow *TrackManiacs*. This is hampered by the fact that there's no collision detection (you can magically drive through each other's cars), but it's still fun and competitive just the same.

With only three cars to race and edges so rough you might as well rub your eyes with sandpaper, the phrase 'hidden depths' has never been so apt for a game. In the past week, desperate attempts at shaving valuable seconds off my lap-times have become my sole reasons for living. This game may look a bit suspect, but it truly and honestly isn't. Try it – you might like it. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

Reviewed Issue 137, Score 85%

A proper car game with great graphics, music and pretty ladies. No loop-the-loops, though.

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON 2

Reviewed Issue 123, Score 80%

Designing the coasters is the best bit, just as it is in *TrackMania*.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Insanely addictive
- ✓ Good online play and community
- ✓ Original and fun premise
- ✗ Basic graphics and car handling
- ✗ Quite pricey for what it is
- ✗ My fingers hurt

79

Better than you think

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Features

- 5 playable nations.
- It is the first game based on the events of WW I.
- Realistic visual effects (explosions, debris, fire and many others),
- Impressive 3D landscapes and 3D sound make the player feel they're at the battlefield.
- Massive combats (up to 10,000 units can take part in a battle from each side, & more than 80,000 units on a single map!)
- Non-linear mission structure and authentic historical battles.
- Multiplayer mode (up to 8 players).
- Various units of that period weaponry, armor, vehicles, buildings, which are different for each nation.

"Entente may well be the 'sleeper' hit of the year." - Wargamer.com

"Shooting down an enemy biplane and seeing it plow through your armies marching across the field below is mighty satisfying." - IGN

90% - Gold Award
GamersHall



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There are many NPCs, and they talk. A lot.



Combat is as simple as it gets.



The plot's predictable but there is hidden depth.

ANITO: DEFEND A LAND ENRAGED



■ \$20 from www.aninoentertainment.com | Pub: Anino Entertainment | Dev: Anino Entertainment | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and a 4MB 3D card **DESIRES** A P4 to stop the slowdown when several NPCs are on screen at once

No land is going to remain enraged for long if **Chris Anderson** has anything to do with it

OK, YOU can stop laughing now – it's not easy to come up with game titles you know. And what's with the tittering at the 2D graphics? Visuals aren't everything. You can lay off the control interface too – years ago most games were controlled using the keyboard. If it was good enough then... OK, I'll give up. It's all but impossible to defend the dated

presentation and clunky interface that are constant reminders *Anito* was designed and developed by a small start-up development company.

Further reminders come in the form of the 'I lost my father, I must find him' leanings of the storyline, and the simplistic point and hit mechanics of the combat system. But perhaps the biggest reminder of *Anito's* roots in

yesteryear are the constant prompts to move your character closer when talking to NPCs or picking up objects – this becomes very irritating, very quickly. There is also unforgivable slowdown when several NPCs are on screen, which should never happen given the technology on display.

But it's not all bad. Some elements of *Anito* show a lot of

care went into the game. Many of the NPCs have a lot to say for themselves, and the history of the gameworld is brought to life through books and documents. If you're after a basic adventure game it works pretty well.

But that's as good as it gets. The minor RPG and combat elements ensure *Anito* will remain an interesting novelty diversion, but it's more likely that

the game will serve as a reminder that action adventures used to have depth. Discerning RPG veterans are unlikely to give it a second glance with far better titles on offer.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

47

**They don't make 'em
like this anymore**

CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH

■ £19.99 | Pub: Take 2 Interactive | Dev: Big Ape | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 450, 128MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card **DESIRES** A PIII 600 is better

Will Porter finally realises that life is essentially meaningless

SOMETIMES when a reviewer is giving a game a good solid kicking, they look down momentarily at the squirming piece of software beneath their feet and see a glimmer of what could have been in its petrified eyes. A sign that someone, long ago, once cared for it and felt that one day it would do them proud. It is then, with a sorrowful heart, that the reviewer bends down, reaches for its scrawny neck and puts it out of its misery.

There is no such welling up of tears for *Celebrity Deathmatch*. A marketing ploy for the semi-good claymation MTV show of years past, *Celebrity Deathmatch* is the worst fighting game (and pretty much the worst game) I have ever insulted my hard drive with. For a start, the fighters are barely celebrities: Jerry Springer and Marilyn Manson, they're acceptable. But Cleo, Shannen Doherty, Cindy Margolis, various Hammer

Horror monsters and Carrot Top? My Dad was Sheep Farmer of the Year 1986, and that made him twice as famous on these shores than that lot put together.

But what about the fighting? Jesus! Not only did I complete all six episodes on medium difficulty in just over an hour, but the actual fights are such displays of mindless button-tapping hell that they do as much for the human spirit as the collected works of Nietzsche. The game is dire. Even the *Mortal Kombat*-styled finishers, in which spines are removed, heads explode and ribcages are played like xylophones, refuse to provide a laugh or a flicker of gameplay.

This is a lifeless corpse of a game. I'm giving it five per cent more than I should because Mr T is in it (and in any sane world all games would have Mr T in them). But be warned: even limited exposure to this atrocity will numb your soul for evermore.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

11

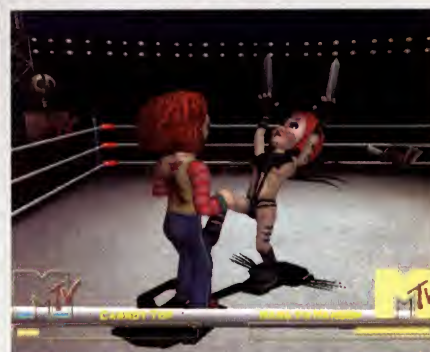
Turd



It may look like fun. But it isn't.



Mr T delivers an ass-whupping.



Marilyn Manson vs obscure US comedian.

HOT WHEELS: HIGHWAY 35 WORLD RACE

■ £14.99 | Pub: THQ | Dev: Climax | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 600, 128MB RAM and 32MB 3D Card DESIRES A GeForceFX 3D card to make the most of the pretty visuals

Will Sargent rekindles his childhood racing memories

LIKE LEGO before it, the 35-year-old Hot Wheels franchise has had to adapt to changes in the toy market and 'go digital' in recent times, unashamedly rebranding the classic Micro Machines as its own for an opening assault on the PC market.

Carefully avoiding clichés about this latest offering being another kids' game (a common excuse for plain crap games), we were actually thrilled to see Climax (yes, the same Climax behind the solid *MotoGP*) offering support for DX9 special effects. At last, something to get that GeForceFX sweating.

And what a celebration of colour and light this is. Incandescent reds, greens and blues emanate from the screen, lending a *Wipeout/F-Zero*-like feel to the 15-plus futuristic courses. Hurrah! Let's all group-hug DX9 and its pixel-trickery, and banish for ever those turd-

like browns and greens we've suffered for so many years.

Admittedly, the game is aimed at a young audience, and as such, it's all too easy to win. The catch-up system favours the stragglers at the back, so it definitely won't appeal to *Grand Prix 4* buffs who pore over post-race aerodynamics data.

Simply pick up rings to fill the nitro boost meter, then use the turbo to make impossible stunt jumps through space. The tracks offer bags of fun, with loop-the-loops, head-spinning inverted sections and plentiful short cuts.

If you were part of the original Hot Wheels toy revolution, you'll enjoy playing with 15 cars from the authentic Highway 35 anniversary collection. It may be easy, but it's good clean fun too.

PCZONE VERDICT **58**
Solid, if simple



Curling one out across the universe.



Hold on to your hats, we're going down...



Ready for take-off? Then hit the nitro.



Nitro engaged: we have lift off.

BLADE & SWORD

■ £24.99 | Pub: Whiptail Interactive | Dev: Pixel Studios | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PII 266, 128MB RAM and an 8MB 3D Card DESIRES PIII 500 is better

A Kung Fu-inspired action-RPG? Will Sargent prepares himself

TEN years ago, the label 'Made in China' was more associated with cheap plastic toys featuring dangerous spiky bits and fireworks that blow eyebrows off before a match has even been struck. This issue, however, we cast such

stereotypes aside and warmly welcome the world's most populated country to the games-making fraternity.

Scouring the world's back streets for bargain projects, maverick publisher Whiptail Interactive (infamous of late for

publishing the likes of *Postal 1* & *Postal 2*) looked East. There it found *Blade & Sword*, a game lovingly crafted in China by the freshly-formed Pixel Studios.

Blade & Sword attempts to sprinkle some good old *Monkey* magic into an action-RPG mix, with a yarn firmly entrenched in ancient Chinese folklore. The description on the back of the box claims that the game features "Diablo-like action elements and *Street Fighter* arcade combat". Having played it, we can say that these claims are misleading.

Had the packaging read: "Reasonably competent RPG with over-fiddly combat, an awful manual and graphics straight out of *Lure Of The Temptress* on the Atari ST", then it would have scored an extra two per cent for honesty.

The manual, along with the entire in-game script, has clearly



Save time wandering the maps with these teleports.

"Blade & Sword attempts to sprinkle some Monkey magic into an action-RPG mix"

been translated from Chinese. Okay, so we can forgive the clumsy in-game dialogue (just), but the manual's chapter on creating combo-attacks, which are critical to master in order to progress, is so unclear it could put you off for good.

But we soldiered on, learned a few moves through trial and

error, and levelled-up sufficiently to slash our way through a hefty proportion of the game. And you know what? We're quite enjoying it now... [C]

PCZONE VERDICT **55**
Lost in translation



A roasting from the locals looks likely.

VIETCONG: FIST ALPHA

■ £19.99 | Pub: Gathering | Dev: Pterodon | Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 256MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card
DESIRES PIII 800, 512MB RAM and a 64MB 3D card

For Mark Hill, like all Vietnam vets, the nightmare never ends...

**FULL VERSION
OF VIETCONG
REQUIRED**



Not exactly lush Vietnamese greenery, is it?

SINCE ITS release a little over six months ago, *Vietcong* has gathered a solid and loyal fanbase, mostly made up of 'Nam-obsessives who could forgive the game its many flaws as long as they got to shoot plenty of Vietnamese locals. Presumably this add-on of seven missions, with new weapons and the inclusion of planes as well as the usual choppers to watch overhead will light up their scarred and camouflaged faces with pure joy.

Set a couple of years before the full game, this time you play as one of the characters you eventually come across in *Vietcong*. The idea isn't new (*Half-Life's* add-ons did it much better), but if you really enjoyed the original, then no doubt there's enough here to get you mildly excited. The rest of your team is also new, but they all play the same roles of medic, local guide and so on.

The graphics are much the same as the original – still a bit of a mess. The introduction of long grass adds a few more hiding places, it still doesn't look like the Vietnam we've grown up with in dozens of movies. That sickly green doesn't make you want to slap mosquitoes off your shoulders or check for leeches when you wade through a pond.

"If you really enjoyed the original, then no doubt there's enough here to get you mildly excited"

Tweaks to the multiplayer modes are welcome, but are hardly enough to turn it into a world-beater. A bigger cause for celebration is that I didn't come across any of those diabolically awful tunnels that plagued the full game. But, as with all expansion packs, *Fist Alpha* mainly gives you more of the same. Whether that's a good or a bad thing depends on what you thought in the first place. **[C+]**



Vietcong seems to work better when it stays out of dense jungles.

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

70

More of the same



Shit! Lamppost!

DEAD TO RIGHTS

■ £29.99 | Pub: LSP Games |

Dev: Namco/Bitmap Brothers | ETA: Out Now

REQUIRES PIII 500, 64MB RAM and a 16MB 3D card with hardware TnL
DESIRES PIII 700, 128MB RAM and a 32MB 3D card

Anthony Holden loves animals, so we gave him a dog

CLAIMING to capture the high-octane, balletic action of Hong Kong action flicks, *Dead To Rights* is more succinctly described as 'Max Payne-lite'. First appearing on PS2 over a year ago, Namco's gritty actioner has the bullet-time, the third-person gunplay, the cop with nothing to lose, and... Well, the bullet-time.

To its credit, *DTR* does balance this unsurprising recipe with one or two cracking ideas of its own. The best of these is Shadow, your K9 attack dog, who you can send forth to rip out enemies' throats, and manoeuvre through narrow or inaccessible passageways to trigger switches. You can also grab human shields, disarm enemies and even hurl gas canisters at your opponents, exploding them somewhere in the vicinity of an enemies' head.

The trouble is, this is a 15-month-old

console game. The conversion job can't be faulted, but the entire interface has been designed to make *Max Payne*-style action manageable without a keyboard and mouse. As a result, when you do have a keyboard and mouse, *DTR* feels like a flimsy kid's game, with an 'acquire target' function in place of actual aiming.

That said, *Dead To Rights* does offer a bit of mindless fun. Apart from the slo-mo violence, there's a sense of wilful B-grade exploitation here, which sees you entering a variety of whorehouses, strip clubs and similarly contrived settings. There's even a rhythm-action style pole-dancing mini-game that's sure to raise a smile.

Ultimately though, this is a shallow console experience, especially when compared to the likes of *Max Payne 2*, and really has no business being on the PC in the first place. **[C+]**

**PCZONE
VERDICT**

59

Plastic, not fantastic

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TOMB RAIDER: CHRONICLES

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: March

IT'S THE end of *Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation*, and tragically, Lara is presumed dead. Men cry tears of despair and Eidos goes out of business. Only kidding. We all know that Lara reappeared several years later, alive and well in the hideously bugged *Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness*. But before the new era of Lara began, we got this, a collection

of four adventures which the buxom one embarked on in the years prior to being erroneously declared deceased.

The first sees Lara in Rome and features some classic *Tomb Raider* jumping and climbing gameplay, enhanced by her new ability to swing from bars like a chimp and traverse tightropes.

The second adventure travels back to when Lara was sweet 16, and takes place on an Irish island packed with demons and ghosts. With only a catapult to hold them off with, the emphasis here is far more on solving puzzles, although these do tend to be pretty rudimentary.

Next is a reasonably action-packed Russian U-Boat base reconnaissance



The four adventures prove to be fairly varied.

mission, and proceedings are finished off with a leather-catsuited Lara infiltrating a tower block aided by an annoying computer hacker.

It's all pretty standard *Tomb Raider* fare really, but although the gameplay is little more than an inferior rehash of what has come before, at five quid, it's still a steal.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

76



Lara's back. Again.



Like simplicity? Like average racers? Then you'll love *Offroad*.

OFFROAD

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now

SUBTLE title this: can you guess what it's about? That's right, it's about racing ridiculous-looking buggies across rugged terrain filled with irritating obstacles and hazardous short cuts.

But is it any good? Well, kind of. Racing aficionados will no doubt spit bile at its meld of wacky ideas and arcade-moulded racing mayhem, but even if you've got a penchant for the simplistic, you'll find nuggets of fun and irksome misjudged ideas in equal measures.

On the positive side, *Offroad* is mildly entertaining, with plenty of options and tracks to satisfy the undiscerning. However, scratch beneath its tacky paintwork and you'll soon find the rust.

Handling and physics are poor, and a nausea-inducing screen-shaking effect when you traverse a bump will soon have you reaching for the sick bucket. Plus, while each track has been designed to throw up unexpected obstacles, it's not too long before you've mastered the lot.

Thankfully, things are improved by a half-decent career mode, which sees you joining better teams if you manage to collect a pre-set amount of points.

Ultimately though, *Offroad* is just another geriatric arcade racer hoping for glory. Will it sell? We don't think so.

Martin Korda

PCZONE VERDICT

58

SEA DOGS

■ £4.99 | Pub: Sold Out | ETA: Out Now



One man and his ship.



Don't look like dogs to me.

CONSIDERED by many to be the first worthy successor to Sid Meier's *Pirates*, *Sea Dogs* is an enjoyable swashbuckler with many different gameplay elements. While the emphasis is most definitely on high seas piratical 3D combat, other distractions such as crew management, land exploration and trading all play a part in producing a well-rounded action-strategy title.

If anything, it's developer Akella's over-ambitious approach which ultimately holds *Sea Dogs* back from standing out from the crowd. While there's undoubtedly great variety in the gameplay, it often feels as though the simplicity of the trading and resource management elements betray their purpose as a means to an end for the inevitable combat, which is the driving force behind *Sea Dogs*.

Nonetheless, it's definitely worth a look if you're interested in an action-strategy title that's a little

off the beaten track. Plus, while it certainly won't hold its own against recent titles in terms of graphics and presentation, it's by no means past its sell-by date. It's also a cheap alternative to its own sequel, since the game mechanics are no different (with the exception of the sequel's console-based interface and tacked-on *Pirates Of The Caribbean* licence).

If you can put up with the inferior graphics, this is better value for money if you're thinking of buying one or the other.

Chris Anderson

PCZONE VERDICT

60



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FEEDBACK

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KOTOR: the best RPG ever?

IT'S YOUR SHOUT

Feedback is here to offer you a platform to have your say about games we've reviewed over the past three issues. Whether you totally agree or utterly disagree with us, we want to hear from you. And all you have to do to get your views in print is send an email to letters@pczone.co.uk with 'Feedback' in the subject line. Please try and keep your views to less than **100 words**. Anything longer will not be considered or may have to be edited for size.

**PRINCE OF PERSIA:
THE SANDS OF TIME**
REVIEWED ISSUE 136 (BY
STEVE HILL), SCORE: 84%

What we thought

Simply categorising the game as a platformer-turned-action adventure doesn't really do it justice, as it manages to transcend lazy pigeonholing to deliver a near seamless gaming experience.

What you said

This game features the most irritating gameplay since time began. The puzzle solving and platform jumping are great fun, admittedly, but the combination of a really crappy camera, third-person view and rooms filled with pillars make the fighting bits so annoying that I nearly broke my keyboard and had to leave the room to cool off! I mean, who thought it would be a good idea to have a stupid whooshing sound every time the camera



Need For Speed: Underground is a real return to form for the series.

gets stuck, as if its inability to keep up is some kind of slo-mo, time-stopping feature?

Sarah Brennan

Steve's comment:

While I wouldn't want to suggest I'm better at the game than you, I didn't find it such a big problem. Combat is a small part of the game to begin with, and the camera is no worse than any other similar third-person game. Then again, it's no better either, so we can forgive you for getting a bit upset. Just don't ever play *Batman: Vengeance* or you'll really blow a gasket.

**STAR WARS: KNIGHTS
OF THE OLD REPUBLIC**
REVIEWED ISSUE 137
(BY RICHIE SHOEMAKER)
SCORE: 94%

What we thought

One of the finest RPGs in the last five years and easily the most accomplished, unique and entertaining *Star Wars* product released in the last decade.

What you said

KOTOR is amazing. It's the best *Star Wars* game I've ever played and also the best RPG. With the myriad of quests available, there's always plenty to be doing, offering a vast wealth of choices and variety, along with the kind of depth that would make the Grand Canyon uneasy and in need of a little sit down.

While the graphics are good, they're nothing special by today's standards. That said, they more than do the job and the battles look very impressive.

Davetsutton

would prefer full real-time combat, the combat system is flexible enough to reach a happy medium between real-time and turn-based. You don't have to wait for turns, you can freely move your character and there's some nice strategy you probably wouldn't find in a turn-based RPG, such as accounting for the throwing range and blast radius of grenades.

deadmartyr

Richie's comment:

It would have been easy to have written *KOTOR* off as little more than a glorified console conversion. But we can take solace from the amount of extra effort Bioware went to in order to ensure PC *KOTOR* was several steps up the evolutionary ladder from its front room cousin. Perhaps not the most exhaustive RPG of all time, but certainly one of the most exhilarating – and yes, very probably the best *Star Wars* game since Yoda's *Desktop Adventures*.

**NEED FOR SPEED:
UNDERGROUND**

REVIEWED ISSUE 137 (BY
WILL SARGENT) SCORE: 85%

What we thought

You'll be genuinely impressed at the leap forward in terms of speed and graphics over its somewhat sluggish predecessors. It totally shats on anything you'll see in

console land. What's that you say? *Project Gotham 2*? Pah!

What you said

For me, customising the cars is the best aspect. Every part you install, whether visible or not, is officially branded. Proper manufacturers names have been used for all the wheels, engine upgrades and other aspects. There's so much scope, I spend nearly as much time changing cars as I do racing them.

That's not to say the racing is bad, though. It has very playable physics, although perhaps not entirely realistic. The lack of crash damage is disappointing for me. It needn't have an effect on the car or how much money you win, but just to see dents and scratches would have added to the immersion.

Divine_madness

Obviously cashing in on *The Fast And The Furious*, I was surprised by how good this game was, especially after the horrible nightmare that was *Need For Speed 6*. After playing through the single-player mode, I can say it was good fun, challenging and never unnecessarily frustrating.

But then came multiplayer mode. First, the interface is absolutely appalling – when you manage to finish a race, you go back to the main screen, not the lobby, or even to the list of servers. Plus, there are cheats (drag-racing a 407mph Peugeot 206 is not fun), and no way to chat in game!

Multiplayer aside, it's a good, solid racing game. OK, so there's nothing new here – it's just bits of other games stuck together, but it's stuck with proper contact adhesive and not just Pritt Stick.

Rich

Will's comment:

I totally agree that a basic *Daytona*-style damage model would add to the experience. And yes, a handling or performance penalty would be harsh – after all, this is an arcade game, not a sim. Multiplayer criticism is also valid. We get the distinct impression this game was built across all formats with single-player in mind – no bad thing in the end. [C]

"The fighting is so annoying, I nearly broke my keyboard and had to cool off!"

SARAH BRENNAN REACTS TO PRINCE OF PERSIA



The Sands Of Time: fun, but frustrating.

**WHAT'S A REALITY CHECK?**

Reality Check is a monthly feature comparing PC games to their real-life equivalents. Or at least, as close as we can get without risking serious bodily harm.

REALITY CHECK: TENNIS GAMES

New balls please! Steve 'Henman' Hill kicks up a racket

BLEAK mid-winter, and a man's thoughts turn to tennis. That's not the conventional wisdom, but on a crisp West London morning I'm already breathing heavily and sweating like a beast. And I'm not even at the top of the escalator yet. Predictably running late, I spill out of the tube station and literally run into none other than erstwhile *ZONE* editor Jeremy Wells. This is the wrong Jeremy. As I explain to him: "Can't stop, I'm off to play tennis with Jeremy Bates."

For once I'm not lying, as I have a 10am slot booked with the former

the tennis court? Cold hard cash, clearly, courtesy of Microsoft, whose latest PR shindig we've managed to hijack.

BERK WEARS WHITE SOX

The prestigious Queens Club is the location and the invite firmly states that whites must be worn. I don't do white trainers, and I certainly don't do white socks. The best I can muster is a battered pair of beige Adidas with matching threadbare socks. As a fellow player remarks, it's more a case of *The Strokes* than the *White Stripes*. Completing the

through a warm-up. Having not picked up a racket in anger for the best part of a decade – *Virtua Tennis* aside – it feels a bit odd, although this is the least of my worries. As soon as ball hits bat, a twinge of pain shoots up my right arm, a relic of an ancient football injury that forces me to hold the racket with both hands like a great big girl, much to the consternation of Bates.

ARE YOU BEING SERVED?

Despite my handicap, I prove surprisingly competent and manage to return the majority of his shots, even occasionally getting the odd one past him. Despite the fact that he isn't really trying, this does prove mildly satisfying.

Serving is a different matter altogether though, thanks to yet another injury. If you're a regular Reality Check reader, you'll recall my infamous 'falling off a log' incident while attempting to complete a military assault course, which left my collarbone looking like the remnants of a plate of poppadoms.

I'm yet to receive a penny of compensation, but if it does ever arrive they can add an extra zero, as my

"An old injury forces me to hold the racket with both hands like a big girl, much to the consternation of Bates"

Wimbledon champion (well, Mixed Doubles). The precursor to Tim Henman as British Number One – and housewives' favourite – Bates also made a brace of Wimbledon quarter-finals in the Men's Singles and was recently appointed British Davis Cup captain. So why has he agreed to put me through my paces on

ensemble with a flimsy pair of EA shorts and an Xbox tennis shirt, it's not a look that's met with any great approval in the locker room, where the chatter is of schooling, golf and the Home Counties.

Thankfully, the session is to take place on an indoor court, and following a brief introduction/apology to Bates, he puts me



**REAL
VS**



NOT REAL



With all his injuries, it's a miracle Hill can even hold a racket.

budding tennis career now lies in ruins. The restricted movement, allied to the dull ache makes my service game more akin to swatting a bumblebee with a spoon. It's as much as I can do to clear the net.

GAME, SET & MATCH

Bates is a hard taskmaster though, and soon has us dashing about the court in a series of training routines. It's high-tempo, switching from backhand to forehand, including cross-court shots, volleys and lobs; all stuff that can be achieved with the flick of a thumb in a game.

Accompanied by the mild encouragement of the Cliff Richard of

tennis, it's actually highly enjoyable, if a little exhausting. Despite tennis's reputation as a gentle sport played by big-toothed posh kids – called Tim or Jeremy – it's clearly a highly physical activity, something that doesn't always come across when cupping a joypad.

Unfortunately, the physical aspect is soon brought home in a very real fashion. Stretching for a vicious return from Bates, the twang of rubber on strings coincides with the twang of my hamstring, and it's game over. I'll stick to videogames.

Limping back from the changing rooms, I corner Bates and ask him what makes him so much better than me.

"About 30 years of practice," he laughs. "The hand-eye coordination in tennis is very important. If somebody wants to really improve you need heart, you need your mind and you need passion. You obviously also need mechanical skills which will take a long time to learn, but these days you need to be a good athlete as well." Thanks. You don't need to be a good athlete to play videogames.

LOST IN TRANSLATION

So, are there any skills that do translate from games? "Apart from hand-eye coordination, I think the thing that's really good from videogames is learning the

"Well done Steve. This is how many balls you managed to hit."

tactics. It gives you a great replication of how to open up the court, and what shot to play at what time. They're very realistic from that point of view."

Is that something that you would see as a professional, that a normal guy may not? "Yes it is," Bates tells me. "Watching the patterns of play, you can learn to play the balls in the right place and it's beneficial from that point of view. As an actual player you learn by trial and error: you know when to take risks, when not to take risks, when to attack, when to defend, when to go in and when not to go in. And those are things that you can practice, but you have to be in the match situation to actually learn it. You can see those patterns in the games."

And does he think there's one aspect that can't be convincingly replicated? "The only thing that's difficult to see is the real speed – the human speed as opposed to the game speed." Having seen me move, he's got a point. **PC**

HOW REAL IS... VIRTUA TENNIS



About as close to tennis as you can get without getting off your arse.

DREAMCAST TO DREAM GAME

Virtua Tennis is looking a bit dated now, but it still plays a tremendous game regardless. Despite its high tempo gameplay, it requires you to constantly think tactically, especially as the AI is extremely lifelike too. Unless *Top Spin* comes to the PC, this is the best we've got.

SCORE



HOW REAL IS... TENNIS MASTERS SERIES



Like a British tennis player, *Tennis Masters* is a brave loser.

MASTER OR SERVANT?

While by no means a straight sets defeat, the *Tennis Masters Series* games aren't quite as intuitive as *Virtua*. However, they are fairly realistic with some solid ball physics. Sadly though, the AI players aren't as smart as those in *Virtua Tennis*. Like Mr Hill, it's a contender hampered by a few failings.

SCORE





LOAD IT

Eliminate two security guards

Find elevator down to street

Discover head of rival faction

Talk to him

Persuade him to abandon the conflict

World shifts towards peace and prosperity



"Immersive, story driven brilliance" 93%
"Intensely involving and rewarding"
"Expertly accomplished"

PC Gamer
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LEAVE IT

Move stealthily past two security guards

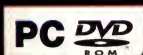
Meet informant on street

Bribe him, buy sniper rifle with cash

Use to execute head of rival faction

Security bots close in, you and 12 bystanders are killed

World shifts towards military tyranny



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THINGS TO COME

■ **ONLINE EDITOR:** Paul Presley

▲ Ever since I started this section some eight months ago, I've been literally inundated with a letter from one of my many, many fans out there in the omni-meta-verse we call life. It reads, "Dear Calvin, the time is nearly upon us. As the heavens open and the moon reaches full waning, surely we have reached the moment in history when towers will crumble and the righteous shall claim their inheritance. Blood will cleanse us all. Repent now, lest ye be forsaken. Love, Uncle Charlie."

Well, young Susan has a point to be sure. 2004 is indeed going to be something of a turning point for the world of MMOGs. Aside from being the annum in which we discover an acronym for the genre that doesn't sound as though it's been belched from the distended gullet of a diseased tramp, the course of 2004 is going to see the eventual releases of an entire menagerie of big-name titles. *EverQuest 2*, *The Matrix Online*, *Warhammer Online*, *World Of Warcraft*, *Middle-Earth Online*, *Dragon Empires*, *Ultima X: Odyssey*, *Mythica* – I could go on.

The first of the 'next generation', *Horizons*, is reviewed on page 102, and the lesson to be learnt is that to survive the forthcoming massively multiplayer melange, the big-name games are going to have to show us something more than just an *EverQuest* gaming model in different robes. It's nothing to do with money or big-name backing (look at *A Tale In The Desert* for proof) – it's about ideas. Good ideas, of course, but ideas nonetheless.

Virtual Traders Take Off

ONLINE GAMERS CAN NOW PLAY FOR FUN AND PROFIT



Horizons is the newest MMOG to be added to the list.

FED UP OF wasting your money month after month in one MMOG or another? Thanks to an enterprising chap in Canada, it's finally no longer just the publishers making money from online gaming.

The Gaming Open Market (www.gamingopenmarket.com) is the brainchild of financial whiz and gaming enthusiast, Jamie Hale. Traders registered on the GOM can buy and sell their in-game money reserves, either for real cash, or for corresponding amounts in other games.

MMOG asset trading is nothing new, but as Hale explains, there's never been a central point of access crossing several gaming titles at once. "I saw an interesting opportunity to trade goods in the games that I enjoyed playing," he says, "but digging through the listings on auction sites such as eBay made it difficult to see exactly where the good value was. I need to know certain things before I get into a trade. Price history is a big one. Price

spread is another – the distance between bid and ask prices. How many people are buying and selling helps indicate which way the market is likely to move. All of these things were missing at eBay. Not to fault eBay – it's a terrific tool for online auctions. Just not for trading game currencies."

Currently the GOM conducts currency exchanges (at fluctuating rates dictated by real-world supply and demand – some traders have even been simply playing the markets rather than the games) in *Star Wars Galaxies*, *The Sims Online*, *There*,



Therebucks can be traded for cash.



The Gaming Open Market in action.

Second Life, *Ultima Online* and, most recently, *Horizons*.

"We've been operating on a very small budget to start," says Hale. "In light of the tremendous response we've received over the past two months, we're looking to expand. Our plan is to support the newer games as they are released. We want players to be able to create the market themselves as quickly as they need to. Looking down the road, 2004 should be a huge year for MMOGs. We plan to be there."



Now trading in the virtual world, too.



Maybe your *Second Life* can be a profitable one?



94
SW: BATTLEFRONT
Strike at the Empire



102
HORIZONS
Atari takes on EverQuest



107
CORE COMBAT
PlanetSide plumbs the depths



113
NEVERQUEST
Watch out Tiger, here comes Hill

PlanetSide Battles On

THE NEVER-ENDING WAR GETS A MAKEOVER

FOLLOWING THE negative reaction to PlanetSide's first major expansion pack (see p107), Sony has come out all guns blazing, announcing a raft of updates and improvements – a clear message that the never-ending war for Auraxis won't be, er, ending any time soon.

Most tellingly, the expansion's new modules are set to be spawned at a rate comparable to the amount of subterranean activity taking place – a move designed to encourage more people to take advantage of the new terrains offered by the expansion.

Above ground, more emphasis is being placed on capturing a continent's Capitol building, warpgates are becoming 'dynamic' in nature and defensive force drones are being activated – all designed to help concentrate the flow of combat.

All of these moves suggest Sony is committed to the fight for the foreseeable future. Whether the participants will remain that way is yet to be seen.



A more focused battle experience is promised.

THE SIMS OUTSIDE

THE FIRST MAJOR CONVENTION FOR THE VIRTUAL LIFE POSSE

THE REAL AND online worlds took another step closer to merging into a sort of giant Matrix-style reality warping, as EA announced the first ever International SimCon – a massive real-world convention for fans of *The Sims Online*. "We want to bring the game experience to

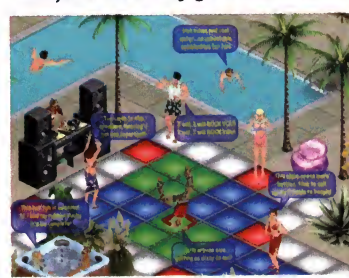
real life," said event director Troy Pruyt, unaware that he'd already been beaten to the punch by the teenage girl recently found to be running the world's first virtual brothel within the game for real-world profit.

Instead, the ISC will be concentrating on being a more refined affair, with black tie nights, an awards ceremony, five course dinners and a fancy dress party in which, you guessed it, the idea is to come as your in-game persona.

The International SimCon will be held at the Michigan Hyatt Regency Hotel from February 22-24. If you're interested (and can cover the cost of the plane ticket), you'd better book quick – advanced reservations are already numbering around the 200 mark and expectations are high for both EA and the players who make up the *Sims* community. Most of them are no doubt sweaty palmed with excitement at the possibility that even just one of the in-game 'hot chicks' might actually turn out to 'be vaguely similar in real life...



Hello, are there any girls in here?



Hi there, do you come to these Sims conventions often?

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

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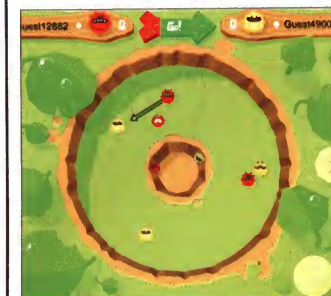
(WWW.GLOBULOS.COM)

Globulos. Globulos. Globulos. Has one word ever brought such mayhem to a single magazine? Ever since we've discovered the delights of this French oddity, quality control has gone through the floor. Every time you spot a spelling mistake in this issue, you can blame *Globulos* for distracting us.



Conceptually it's simple. Remember all those maths lessons about trigonometry that you never thought would come in handy at school? Sucker! There's a variety of game boards and types, but just one basic idea – bounce your globz about the screen, rebound them off walls, balls or other globz. Knock your opponent's king into the pit, hit the ball into your opponent's goal, or race your opponent through the numbered hoops towards the finish line.

Sounds stupid, huh? You're right, it is. Utterly stupid. People have laughed at me as they walked past the desk,



Just one more go...

wondering why I'm wasting a computer that could power a 1970s moon landing with silly kids' games. Then they have a go. And another. And another and another and another, and before you know it they've registered, logged onto the ranking system and are begging you for one more game before you leave for the night.

In truth, I'm loathe to recommend *Globulos* to you all as it's likely to cause office productivity to drop to all-time lows across the country. Britain will be plunged into chaos as stock deals collapse, meetings with clients go begging, power grids overheat, cats and dogs live together – mass hysteria. But at least you won't be short of a game, so it's not all bad.

DEVELOPER DIARY



DRAGON EMPIRES

PETER TYSON, Codemasters



A whole new meaning to high-rise living...

One feature that we are very excited about is the ability for players to control and develop towns. Towns and cities give clans a unique hold over the economy and the political development of their region. It also gives the ruling clan status, and other players will recognise its success.

To control a town a clan must capture it, having first impressed the Dragons through regularly fighting other players and beating them in PvP battles. Once the clan is established it can then challenge cities that are performing poorly. If the challenge is agreed by the Dragons, a battle takes place at a set time in and around the desired city. Should the clan capture all of a city's capture points it then takes control.

"Clans must capture towns, having first impressed the Dragons through fighting other players"

Once a clan owns a city the first task is to set its trade speciality. This determines which goods will become progressively cheaper and quicker to make the longer the clan holds the city. A particularly efficient city will be popular with many players looking to make and sell items because of the low cost of manufacture.

The clan can also change the colours of building trim and flags, and personalise the city in any way it wants. The clan leader is also able to change the tax rate of the city. Tax is added to the cost of every purchase and goes into the town funds for that clan. These funds are used on improving the city status. Maintaining city status is important - should it fall too low the ruling clan will find itself having to fight to keep control of its town.

The town can also improve its status by getting friendly city-ruling clans to vote for it. Once a week each clan has to vote for or against other cities, and this vote could decide which clans survive to the next week and which have to fight to control their land.

The end result is a feature which incorporates fighting, economics and politics into one complex system. We think this adds great depth and complexity and will keep players interested for a long time.

Till then!

EQ's Golden Apple?

GATES OF DISCORD SHOWS THERE'S LIFE IN THE OLD DOG YET

LIKE A SENILE but much-loved elderly relative, *EverQuest* just refuses to roll over and die, instead hanging onto life despite being well past its sell-by date. Granting yet another stay of execution, Sony is just about to release the seventh expansion pack for the world of Norrath.

Gates Of Discord introduces the land of Taelosia, a whole new continent for adventures. This once pleasant land of peaceful labourers is now twisted by some dark menace or another...

Available as either a retail purchase or secure download, anyone plumping for the former will receive a special in-box gift, as well as a unique in-game magical item. At least anyone buying the game in America will. At the time of writing, Ubisoft has yet to confirm the retail details for UK gamers.

As well as new worlds to loot, *Gates Of Discord* offers 100 new abilities, an alternative method of character advancement, a new 'Berserker' character class (able to wield dual axes and



Hopefully they'll have it built by the time of release.

chuck bloody great rocks about the place) and dozens of brand new stories and quests to keep you going. You'll even be able to explore an entire city based on board a ship. Which is different.

The gates are due to open any day now, and our man at the forefront of Norrath will be heading out on a scouting expedition next month.

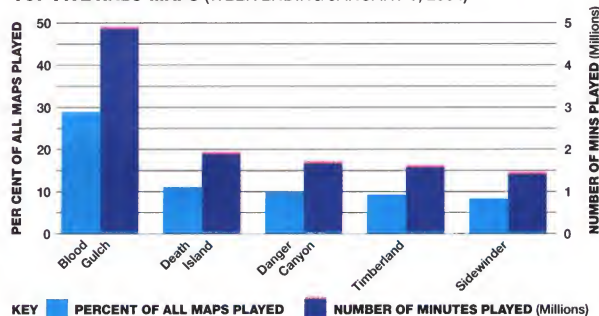
- Publisher: Ubisoft
- Developer: Sony Online Entertainment
- ETA: February 2004
- Website: www.everquest.com

STATZONE

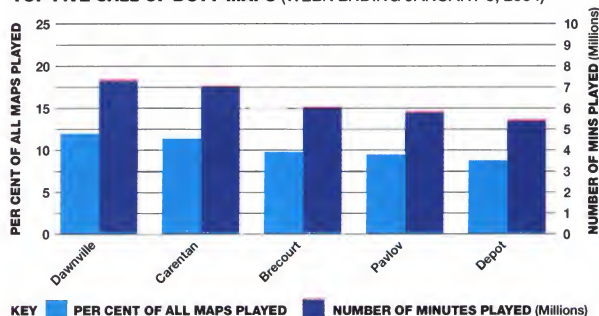
A LOOK AT THE DATA SHAPING YOUR ONLINE WORLD

ALL DATA SUPPLIED BY:
CSports.net

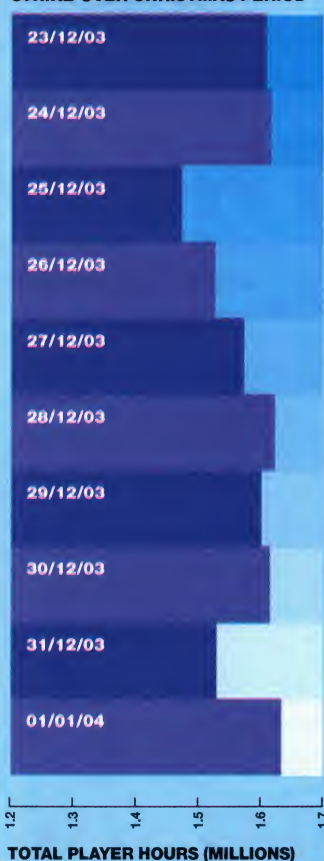
TOP FIVE HALO MAPS (WEEK ENDING JANUARY 5, 2004)



TOP FIVE CALL OF DUTY MAPS (WEEK ENDING JANUARY 5, 2004)



PLAYER HOURS FOR COUNTER-STRIKE OVER CHRISTMAS PERIOD



WELCOME TO MY WORLD...

ROBIN DEWS, *Warhammer Online*

"We wanted to design, develop and deliver a cool, exciting and innovative MMOG that was shot through with the *Warhammer* background"

ROBIN DEWS WARHAMMER ONLINE

"WHAT YOU HAVE to understand here is that *Warhammer* is far more than simply a set of tabletop battle rules," explains general manager on *Warhammer Online* Robin Dews patiently when asked about the game's source material. "We've been developing the *Warhammer* world now for over 20 years in the form of artwork, miniatures, game-rules, comics, fiction, collectible card games and so on. What we have is an extremely coherent world, complete with geography, politics, economics, religion and cosmology. It's a cool kind of place."

It's a grimy one too. If you've ever dabbled with Games Workshop's fantasy world, in whatever incarnation, you'll know that the Reikland, *Warhammer*'s fantasy setting, is as far from the standard sub-Tolkien fare as you can get.

"Not for us the rather more cartoon approaches to landscape and buildings," remarks Dews. "We wanted a full-on medieval environment with mud, blood, filth and grime! Think *The Name Of The Rose* meets Terry Gilliam's *Jabberwocky* and you won't be far wrong."

The world that Dews and co have spent the last two decades crafting is as dirty and dangerous as it is huge. The daunting realities of recreating the whole thing in computer form weren't lost on the team and certain compromises had to be made as a result. "If you're unfamiliar with the *Warhammer* world, you have to imagine a kind of distorted version of planet Earth with all continents of a roughly similar size and shape," Dews describes. "On this map, the *Warhammer* Old World covers the equivalent of Europe – from Madrid to

Moscow. The section we're recreating for the game, an area between the Grey Mountains and the river Reik, is the equivalent of the border between Germany and France."

This vast land is being filled with plenty of content to keep players occupied. "We wanted to be able to create cities in the game," says Dews of the team's other major ambition. "These are hard to do because of all the technical issues associated with large numbers of building polygons. However, we were determined to create what we call 'urban dungeons' – city-based adventuring areas that would captivate the players and provide them (and us) with huge opportunities for character development and questing. We still don't know how large these will end up being, but even the smallest is now significantly bigger than in any comparable MMOG."

That said, the team doesn't appear overly concerned with what its rivals are doing, concentrating instead on creating a game true to their own vision. "We set out to create more than simply a *Warhammer* MMOG," Dews concludes. "Rather, we wanted to design, develop and deliver a cool, innovative, exciting MMOG that was shot through with the *Warhammer* background. It's a subtle difference, but an important one to the design team." [E2]

■ **Publisher:** Sega
 ■ **Developer:** Games Workshop
 ■ **ETA:** 2004
 ■ **Website:** www.warhammeronline.com

Begun, the clone wars have...

STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT

Star Wars meets Battlefield 1942? Scott Steinberg feels a great disturbance in the Force

CV**PANDEMIC**

PANDEMIC STUDIOS

One of the rising stars of the Californian games industry, this Santa Monica-based outfit is showing an increasing knack for pounding out critically acclaimed and commercially underrated hits.

1999 The action-heavy *Battlezone II* ships to mixed reviews, prompting Pandemic to shift focus to the burgeoning strategy market.

2000 Success! While no blockbuster, the company scores a minor coup with the well-received futuristic endeavour, *Dark Reign 2*.

2002 A big year for the growing developer. First, it makes headway in the sporting arena with the superb baseball sim *Triple Play 2002* (PS2 and Xbox). Later, the firm scores the dubious honour of making the best *Army Men* title ever in *Army Men RTS*.

2003 Polishes off a spate of respectable console releases as the GameCube edition of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* debuts. Official relationship with LucasArts established.

2004 One potential blockbuster just isn't enough for the LA lads. Also on the docket for the coming year is *Full Spectrum Warrior*, a tactical battle simulator with promise aplenty.

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Pandemic Studios

PUBLISHER LucasArts/Activision

WEBSITE www.lucasarts.com

ETA Autumn 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Multiplayer action set in the *Star Wars* universe
- Two eras, 15 environments and 20 classes to choose from
- Savage adversaries in ten vehicles including AT-STs, X-Wings and speeder bikes
- Fight on foot, behind turrets and from the back of mounted craft
- Support for 32 combatants via Internet, 64 on a LAN





An Olympic cyclist throws in his lot with the Rebel Alliance.

BEGUN, the Clone Wars most certainly have, but end in a protracted lawsuit, they quite possibly will. Impressed with the phenomenal success of EA's *Battlefield 1942* franchise, LucasArts will soon, ahem, 'pay homage to' said series with a full-blown skirmish simulator of its own. Dubbed *Star Wars Battlefront*, the title should make 'large-scale online warfare' a household term when it ships this year. The only question is, will this be the online shooter *Star Wars* fans have always dreamed of, or another slap in the face for loyal *Wars* buffs?

Obviously hopeful of the former, we tracked down the *Battlefront* bods at LucasArts for an early look at their new project. What we discovered was a game that builds cleverly on the *Battlefield 1942* formula, as well as going out of its way to keep the fans (that's you) happy.

STAR WARRIORS

For the uninitiated, here's the gist. Participants plug in, link up, choose a team and blow each other sky high with an array of brand-specific weapons and vehicles. Like *Battlefield*, the main game sees you vying for control of a number of checkpoints in each map, and like *Battlefield* you can switch between first- and third-person perspectives at will. Learning from the fact that only one of *Battlefield*'s modes (Conquest) is widely

enjoyed, *Battlefront* offers only two major multiplayer modes – Instant Action and Galactic Conquest. And that's where the differences really begin.

"Gameplay in *Battlefront* is clearly similar to *Battlefield 1942* in nature," admits LucasArts producer Jim Tso. "However, we want to immediately differentiate the titles, and we feel that adding a layer of strategy and depth between maps will achieve this." To wit, hostile exchanges aren't merely one-off encounters; they actually have a lasting effect on a campaign's outcome. In the Galactic Conquest mode, opposing teams literally compete for dominion over the known universe. Capture every checkpoint on a planet (usually involving winning at least two battle maps), and you gain control of that planet. Conquer all of the planets, including Hoth, Endor, Naboo, Tatooine and Geonosis, and the galaxy – and the game – is yours.

On top of this, if you manage to hold a territory for a certain period, your team will be awarded with one of a range of special attacks. These bonuses aren't simply gimmicks, either. If the Imperials control Tatooine for example, they can call upon Darth Vader for personal aid on the battlefield. And if you think the Dark Lord of the Sith isn't intimidating enough, control of Endor actually gives you access to the Death Star, which

instantly vaporises an entire world. Bearing this in mind, it's a godsend that the Rebels can also seek occasional aid from heroes such as Luke Skywalker. As Tso suggests, "Features like this are going to impact gameplay in ways that audiences haven't even imagined yet."

A WRINKLE IN TIME

Needless to say, *Battlefront* is also a class-based affair, with over 20 character types spread across four factions: Rebel Alliance, Imperial Army, Clone Army and Battle Droids. Unfortunately, Jedi and Sith will only appear as NPCs, despite the fact that the game straddles both classic and prequel-era *Star Wars*. Not to worry though, as you'll still have some wildly different character classes to choose from, as each splinter group offers a distinctive selection of units.

In keeping with the times, choices include scouts – sharpshooters armed with sniper rifles and probe droids – as well as low-level infantry types such as storm troopers and Rebel grunts. The ranks are further swelled by assault troopers, designed for anti-vehicular use, and pilots, the only class who can patch up damaged vessels. Unique selections also grace each political bloc, such as the Separatists' nigh-on unstoppable

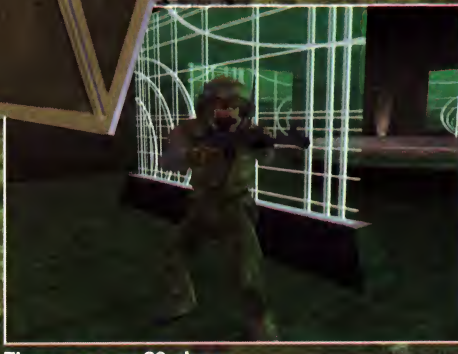




You must admit that's more impressive than your average Tommy gun.



Control of certain territories yields special powers.



There are over 20 player classes to choose from.



The addition of smart multiplayer bots gives *Battlefront* a definite edge.

Droideka robot or the Republic's jetpack-equipped Specialist. The Rebel Spy should prove a favourite as well, given that these skilled confidence men can impersonate adversaries at will. Co-ordinated assaults will also be made easier by the inclusion of full voice-over IP technology. "Headset support is critical to team communication," comments Tso.

supply. Never mind that the purists will be up in arms.

RIDE OR DIE

Of course, there's also a range of vehicles to pilot, and again the range of options is generous. Over ten different air and ground vessels will be available at launch, some of which, like the Rebel Gunship,

"Co-ordinated assaults will also be made easier by the inclusion of full voice-over IP technology"

With four very different factions and the option to stage anachronistic matchups (say, Republic versus Battle Droids), replay value certainly won't be in short

can hold up to six units. Manning a Trade Federation tank's turrets, employing a Snowspeeder's tow cables against invading AT-ATs, or hosing down enemies

with laser fire from an X-Wing are just a few possible options. Even animal mounts can be utilised if fur, and not fireproof plating, suits your tender buttocks better.

Clearly, the ability to recreate major cinematic conflicts (which needn't play out as depicted in the films) is anticipated as a top selling point. So too is the fact that any character can commandeer any vehicle or man any firing station, though not every character performs as well as others behind the controls. Just be careful who you're trying to carjack – as Tso aptly puts it, "Let's just

say facing an AT-ST with nothing more than a blaster rifle isn't advised."

Each vehicle is also powered by a distinctive physics model, the fanciful nature of which should do plenty to distinguish the game from its reality-obsessed competitors. LucasArts strongly believes such characteristics will see the product define a unique identity for itself among offerings such as *Joint Ops* and *Battlefield Vietnam*. The presumption, naturally, is that audiences would rather choose a speeder bike over a Sherman tank any day.

COMPUTER LOVE

WHAT'S A MULTIPLAYER GAME WITHOUT BOTS?

The biggest disappointment of *Battlefield 1942* was the single-player mode, a woeful abortion of a thing forcibly tacked on to the core game. In the case of *Battlefront*, much more thought has gone into making the solo mode worthwhile.

For a start, there's the AI bots. LucasArts assures us that it's been working hard on these tricky little buggers, making sure they're both worthy adversaries and useful team-mates. Working in a coherent squad, you'll be able to issue orders to soldiers in your team or your general vicinity, giving you more of a commander's role in the proceedings. And as mentioned, you can also unlock a range of special attacks, which should add some much-needed depth.

At this stage, we can't see these additions taking a great deal of focus away from the online game, but we'll reserve judgement until the AI is more complete. The best outcome will be if the bots truly are smart enough to use to fill out multiplayer servers, making sneaky office LAN sessions that much more feasible.



NB: bright orange flight suits, not great camouflage.



In Galactic Conquest mode the fate of the entire galaxy is at stake, as you vie for control of planets.

Predictably, proper game balancing will be crucial to achieving the title's goals. Aware of the challenges inherent with this sort of design, Pandemic has been addressing the problem since day one. Known collectively as the "War Room," an elite cadre of testers spends night and day with the product, submitting daily reports on progress from the sole perspective of playability. Code revisions are made shortly thereafter, and the process begins anew each dawn.

Open Beta programs are further anticipated, meaning you may yet lay hands on a tie fighter without a prolonged wait. Clearly, player feedback is being taken seriously for this project. The evidence of careful faction balancing can already be seen. The Rebels encompass

fewer classes than the Imperials, yet can equip their grunts with a greater variety of weapons. Conversely, the Empire offers a greater unit



selection, but characters tend to specialise and wield fewer, more powerful forms of offensive gear.

THE SHOTGUN APPROACH

Aiming for *Star Wars* fans, *BF1942* fans and FPS fans in one fell swoop, *Battlefront* could enjoy a huge following at

launch. Rumours have been swirling regarding the product's cross-platform release (versions are planned for PS2 and Xbox), but *ZONE* readers needn't worry – we've already confirmed the PC as the primary target platform. There'll be no skimping on online functionality either, with the product capable of handling 32 players via Internet or 64 on a LAN, as opposed to half those numbers for the console editions.

Indeed, with a proven formula in place and an exciting, unpredictable campaign mode to add flavour, *Battlefront* looks perfectly placed to conquer the online galaxy. "Wait and see what we've got cooking, smiles Tso. "Save an unpredicted calamity of galactic proportions, I can't picture any way *Star Wars* fans will be disappointed." [CZ]

Q&A

JIM TSO

We talk to producer Jim Tso about life on the front line.

PCZ *Battlefront's* gameplay has been described as open-ended. Are there also going to be any mission-oriented scenarios or major goals to be accomplished?

JT No. Play will always be open-ended and what you make of it. Players can choose to fight on one planet or several, or they can also take over the galaxy in *Galactic Conquest* mode.

PCZ Famous personalities: who'll be making a cameo and in what way?

JT This is still in flux, but it's probably a safe bet to expect a certain Dark Lord of the Sith to make an appearance.

PCZ Weapons – what's on the roster?

JT Blasters, grenades, mines, droids, repair equipment – you name it.

PCZ How will vehicles control, compared to, for example, *Battlefield 1942*?

JT Vehicles will be fairly easy to manoeuvre. We're not making a hardcore simulation game. More than one player can also enter most and take up various posts. It makes things more interesting – or so we suppose.

PCZ Of the four factions offered, who kicks the most ass?

JT That depends entirely on personal preference. We're in the process of balancing the sides right now. Our intention isn't to make any more powerful than the other necessarily, just have them feel different based on varying strengths and weaknesses.

PCZ Is combat composed strictly of ground-level engagements?

JT Yes. All combat is planetary based. Sorry, no space duels.

PCZ Were any lessons learned from previous *Star Wars* titles that are applied here?

JT We're applying many lessons learned in terms of weapons balancing, vehicle interaction and map design from games such as *Clone Wars* and *Jedi Knight*, but the basic gameplay is very different.

PCZ Will one-shot kills be possible?

JT That's yet to be determined.

PCZ What about user-created mods... please say they'll be an option.

JT I could, but I might be lying – we haven't decided on that topic yet.

PCZ Any special or secret content that can be unlocked?

JT I'd tell you, but then I'd have to kill you. Painfully.

Why Don't You?...

STORM TROOPERS AND REBEL SOLDIERS ARE ONE THING, BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CRIMINAL ELEMENT?

Jabba is a fat bastard, but even we have to hand it to the corpulent crime lord – despite his bulk, the scumbag throws one hell of a party. Gamorrean guards, Rancor monsters, blue chicks with tentacles – basically all the seedy denizens of the *Star Wars* universe that made it so cool in the first place (back before it got ruined).

What we're saying is, give us a fifth playable faction that takes in all this scum and villainy – a wretched bunch of smugglers and killers with more dirty tricks than a Fett family picnic.

Just picture how beautiful it would be duelling Jabba atop a smoking sailing barge, bounty hunters zipping through the air on jetpacks and pig-men taking nosedives into the Sarlaac pit. It's worth thinking about.





Top up the tan ready for action.



Oops, a shard rift. Run for your lives!

Just a big old ruck in... BALLERIUM

A thousand players? Pah! Will Sargent's ready to take on the whole world

THE DETAILS

DEVELOPER Majorem
PUBLISHER TBC
WEBSITE www.ballerium.com
ETA 2004

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

- Potentially unlimited number of players
- Genuinely persistent universe
- An RTS infused with trad-strategy elements
- Major world events affect all players

CV

MJOREM

MAJOREM

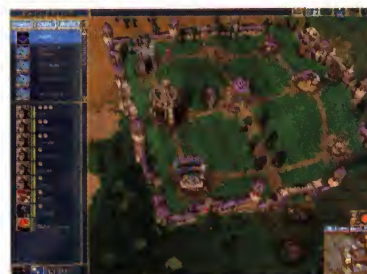
Part of the burgeoning Israeli development scene, Majorem was founded in April 2001 to develop massively multiplayer technology. *Ballerium* is the team's first product (in case you were wondering why you hadn't heard of them), and is currently enjoying a healthy beta testing period.

"IT'S A BIT like *Warcraft*." As understatements go, the description by the developers of the latest (deep breath) persistent massively multiplayer online real-time strategy game, is a doozy.

Quite unlike the world's number one fantasy RTS, which can juggle up to 12 players online, and, say, the equally splendid *Medieval: Total War*, which can manage eight, *Ballerium* caters for potentially an infinite number of participants. No small boast. A better comparison might therefore be made with fellow MMORTS *Time Of Defiance* (on this month's cover discs), which can toss off up to 1,000 gamers at a time.

GENERAL CONTROL

Lead designer Eyal Netanel co-founded Majorem two-and-a-half years ago. He openly admits that a couple of hundred thousand players might be a more realistic, if still optimistic, projection once the *Ballerium* servers are running at full tilt.



Refuel in safety within the city walls.



There's a lot of crazy paving around...

"Our game is probably most like *Warcraft 3*, but only graphically," he admits. "The gameplay is rather different, since there's a lot more strategy, such as trading and role-play, as well as more battlefield tactics and base micro-management. Also, each player controls an entire army, as opposed to just a single avatar."

Armies are managed through the use of generals, with players selecting attack formations, and even issuing AI preferences. Unlike a lot of other RTS worlds, thousands of players can use their armies to compete for control of a single online persistent world, all on one set of servers. "It's not like Battle.net where you play on a limited scale," says Netanel.

TRAD-STRAT FUSION

We like the sound of an RTS alloyed to these *Risk*-like elements, but does such marketing puff about thousands and thousands of players really pique the

swollen cranial lobes of experienced PC gamers? Or make for better games come to that? Fortunately, the talented development crew at Israel-based Majorem hold storytelling and gameplay in as high regard as technological jiggery-pokery.

"The game world is based on rich fantasy, yet with an original setting, different from the standard Tolkien-ish online stuff," ejaculates Netanel. "*Ballerium* is a dying world, where its inhabitants desperately seek to build magical gates to regain power. Players must explore, trade, perform quests and conquer cities. Also, major world events will affect everyone."

Majorem is keeping its cards close to its chest as far as the script is concerned, but we can reveal the cursed landscape is inhabited by seven sentient species, collectively known as the seven children of the sun. Players use Sunpower points (read: action and magic) to



Tanks and catapults will play a big part in the game.



C'mon you lot - party at my house!



You can't deny the graphical similarities to Warcraft.



You're in charge of whole armies, not just a single avatar.

"Ballerium isn't like Battle.net where you play on a limited scale"

EYAL NETANEL
LEAD DESIGNER, MAJOREM

motivate troops. The rate at which your 'suntan' replenishes is dependent upon the race chosen and which sun phase the game is currently in. A nice idea. We wonder if those championing a legion of pasty-faced warriors might need to stock up on factor 20 before they undertake longer quests?

DAY IN THE LIFE

Over to our Israeli friend to describe a passage of play: "Let's say you've just logged on. You leave a sanctuary near a city usually kept by your clan and suddenly see an enemy taking over the last control point of the city. You immediately page, email or phone friends to get online ASAP. Gathering outside the city, where no-one can see, you wait for the right moment and then launch the attack.

"The surprised enemy, already reduced from the city's defences, fights back for a while but eventually scatters. You take a hold of the city again to find that fortunately, it wasn't looted. Time to find out more about the enemy. Who is he? Where did he come from? Who are his allies? And, most importantly, what's his supply route?

"Another colleague tells you the enemy has been making mischief most recently in a city ten minutes to the south east. You gather an army to undertake a revenge crusade, leaving proper defences at your own city. But during the journey

something unexpected happens. Monsters are streaming at you from everywhere. There must be a shard rift in the area! Change of plan. Those monsters must be destroyed first. Who knows, maybe we'll find something useful in the shard rift where they came from...?"

SLEEP EASY

Netanel believes the second big-sell for *Ballerium*, after its capacity for a squillion players, is its genuine persistent strategy capability. This means you can go for a short romantic break in Paris (or anywhere else that's nice) mid-campaign, without having to call home and have the dog check on the state of your armies.

Now call us sceptical old tarts, but a similar promise was made before the launch of *Time Of Defiance*, and the end result was a minor disaster - cunning opponents deliberately wait until you're offline before smashing your hapless troops into submission. But the boys at Majorem are convinced they've cracked the problem with a pile of safety features and 'pre-order' controls to guarantee a good night's sleep when offline. The least we can do is give them the benefit of the doubt until we jump aboard the open public beta later this month. **EW**

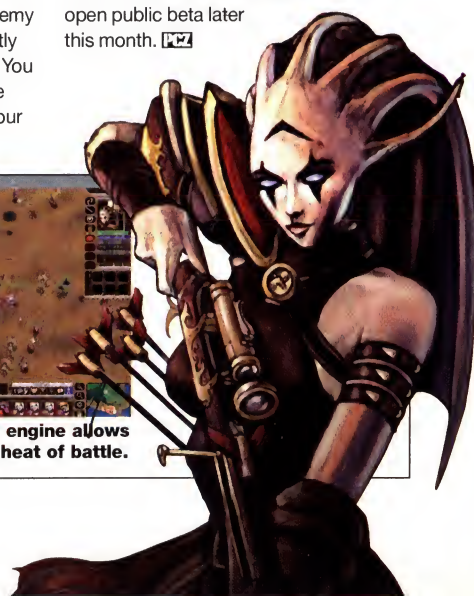
ARE YOU BEING SERVER-ED?

HERE COMES THE SCIENCE BIT...

The brains at Majorem have come up with an ingenious way of sharing CPU power between everyone playing the game, so don't fret if you've got the bandwidth of Beagle 2. The technology to get *Ballerium* up and running smoothly across thousands of machines was in place months before the gamecode existed. It works by minimising the amount of data sent to and from the main game servers, saving much computational effort while ensuring a robust network. As long as, on average, every connected PC can support a certain amount of calculations, there should be no slowdown, even if you're using a basic PC with a 56K dial-up connection. So the bloke next door with the two-grand PC will effectively be supporting your heap of shit. Great!



The powerful rendering engine allows you to zoom out in the heat of battle.



FIGHT CLUB



FIRST RULE OF FIGHT CLUB: PC ZONE OWNZ JØØ
FIGHT CLUB MODERATORS: METALFACE & REX MUNDI

FOLLOWING THE various technical problems of the last few months, it was gratifying to get back into the thick of the action. *Battlefield 1942* was the game in question, with the latest v1.5 patch introducing several new maps to the proceedings for the first time.

■ A particularly impressive sight was the American aircraft carrier looming out of the mists as myself and a loyal band of Japanese soldiers stood on the beach of Iwo Jima. Other highlights included the mass tank march on Aberdeen that only fell apart because one of us (no names, no pack drill) got stuck in a hole – hey, it's easily done. Wandy proved his worth, laying down suppressive fire on a beach assault, and altogether the

general co-ordination on display made for some impressively tight skirmishes.

■ Amongst the readers making a name for themselves were Apogee, Reverb, Doom Harbringer, Sgt. Teddy, DeathofRats, King_Nothing, Lorens, SONIC and *-SB=-*Red-Dragon. Doesn't anyone name their kids John or Frank anymore?

■ As you read this, our *Halo* event on February 5 should have just taken place, and if it's anywhere near as frantic as our regular lunchtime office sessions then we're in for a hell of a time. Anthony's been getting in plenty of *Banshee* practice and there are few finer Scorpion gunners in the business than yours truly. We'll have a full report next issue.

COME & HAVE A GO!
www.zonegames.co.uk
 for all the info



Not exactly a fair fight.



Reverb gives the ZONE team what for.



Prezzer plays his usual blinder. Ahem.

WHO'S WHO

Dave Woods	Kid Unknown
Jamie Sefton	NorthernScum
Anthony Holden	Shokupan
Phil Clark	ShitKicker
Jamie Malcolm	BRAVEART
Martin Korda	Nameless One
Paul Presley	Prezzer
Will Porter	Batspinx
Phil Wand	Wandy

UPCOMING FIGHT CLUB EVENTS

THURSDAY MARCH 4

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Call Of Duty

THURSDAY APRIL 8

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Unreal 2 Expanded Multiplayer

THURSDAY MAY 6

6.30pm – 9.00pm

Unreal Tournament 2004



Wandy makes an advance on the German front.

ZONECHAT

LIVE AND DIRECT - IT'S...

EVER wanted to fire questions at the *ZONE* team? Ever felt like telling us what you like and dislike about the mag? Not been able to find the right email address? Well then prepare yourself, chat fans, for Zone Chat – the greatest innovation in the history of telecommunications since Alexander Graham Bell pegged it down the patent office.

From this month onwards, we'll be hosting a regular get-together in the wonderful world of IRC – the internet's number one method for real-time conversations. Ask us anything. What we think of the latest games. How we put the magazine together. What the chemical weight of Tetrasodium Pyrophosphate is. Can't always guarantee an answer, but at least we'll give it a shot. We can promise fun, games and maybe an occasional prize or two.

So what do you need to get hooked up? Obviously you'll require some sort of IRC program – we recommend mIRC (www.mirc.com) as the most straightforward and easy to use. Once installed and set up, log on to a



**WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 11
5.00PM - 7.00PM**

Quakenet server (irc.uk.quakenet.org) then type /join #pcz to enter the *PC ZONE* channel. There you'll find a whole gaggle of your fellow Zoners, eager to hold court on matters of great import. Or just what's in the mag this month.

So gird your loins, get out your spelling hats and get ready to fire your questions to the team. Things kick off on Wednesday February 11, with Paul 'Prezzer' Presley and Will 'Will' Porter. See you then!

LAN ROVER

STEVE 'SCALPER' RANDALL WITH THIS MONTH'S LAN REGISTRY

Best to start with a bit of abuse of power and advertise my own ggLAN event on February 21-22. It's a small, 20-person two-day event at Queen Mary College, London. It costs £20 in advance, or £30 on the door – expect prizes and surprises. We'll be playing the usual mix, as well as the latest *Unreal Tournament*. Plus I'll be holding five spaces open exclusively for *PC ZONE* readers, so get on in there! Details at www.ggfan.co.uk.

■ If you're into larger events, then February 14-15 has 100 people descending on the Priory Campus in Barnsley courtesy of The Frag Factory. It's £30 for both days, for which you get to enjoy the new location as well as the new 1-gigabit backbone network. All the information you need is available at www.thefragfactory.co.uk.

■ Going even bigger – and into next month – my next mention is for the regular 600-player event at Newbury. *Insomnia 19* from Multiplay runs from March 12-15. Seventy notes will get you in for all four days, and the event now enjoys a 100Mbps internet connection courtesy of BT. If you're really keen you can arrive on Thursday, and for ease of use monitors can be hired too. All the details are available at www.multiplay.co.uk.

■ The Dreamlan event takes place on February 27-29 and costs £35. Near Reading/Didcot, it's a 50-player event, but don't be surprised if all the spaces get taken by the regular BBQ, curry and film-loving LANners. To give you an idea of these guys' attitude, their LAN motto is 'who cares who wins'. Information on how to join them is at www.dreamlan.co.uk.

■ If you're organising an event, let me know with two months' notice at scalper@ggfan.co.uk. Till next month, Scalper out.



Now that's what we call a gathering.

GUILDHALL



▲ FEELING LOST AND ALONE?

Looking for that special group of someones to share your love of group gaming? Wanna, to be blunt, be in my gang? Check out some of the guilds and clans currently recruiting members and soon you too could find happiness, togetherness and a sense of belonging.

CLAN [*GD*] Ghost Dogs

CONTACT The Fox, Wolf or evil3vo

WEBSITE ghost-dogs.low-ping.com

MAIN GAMES *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*

DETAILS We are a relatively new clan that likes to have fun. We are looking to expand into *SOF2*, *Call Of Duty* and *MOH:AA*. We must insist upon players that are committed. You don't have to be good at the game, we just require that you don't suck!

CLAN Bloodguard

CONTACT Kevt10@msn.com

WEBSITE www.BG.swat-portal.de

MAIN GAMES *Freelancer*

DETAILS We are a *Freelancer* clan which is based in Germany, but is run for all of Europe. That said, everything is totally run in English for ease of use for all. We have PvP events twice a week on our own server which goes by the name of '24/7 Bloodguard'. Give us a try. You won't be disappointed!

CLAN #OguK

CONTACT UnKnown/Coatsey

WEBSITE www.oguk.com

MAIN GAMES *Counter-Strike*

DETAILS We are an up-and-coming CS clan, who have conquered *Enemy Down* division three in a matter of days and are beginning our division two challenge. We need support for our server, site and IRC channel, so lend a hand and show your support for #OguK.

CLAN [ZoF]

CONTACT [ZoF]Z0n3D

WEBSITE www.geocities.com/zofclan

MAIN GAMES *Quake III Arena*, *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory*

DETAILS We are a *Quake III Arena* clan who are looking for skilled players for our newly formed *Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory* division. We have been around for two years and all our *Quake III Arena* positions are unfortunately filled. But we are finally opening our *Enemy Territory* division due to popular demand.

CLAN 79th Armoured Division

CONTACT Virus@79tharmoured.com

WEBSITE www.79tharmoured.com/nuke

MAIN GAMES *Call Of Duty*

DETAILS The 79th Armoured Division is an international *Call Of Duty* clan with members from North America and Europe. We started about a month before the release of *Call Of Duty* in Europe. Since then, we've enjoyed fairly speedy growth but are still looking for more people to join us.

CLAN [RUK] Resistance UK

CONTACT k1klass

WEBSITE ruk-dc@cjb.net

MAIN GAME *Desert Combat*

DETAILS We are a new clan, just a few months old, on the *Desert Combat* scene. We will be moving into multiplayer gaming and other leagues soon, but if you are over 18, like a beer and a laugh, and wanna help out with making this a great clan then get in touch!

If you'd like to feature in Guildhall, just send your details and no more than 50 words describing your group to online.zone@pczone.co.uk (subject line: GUILDHALL). Alternatively, drop us a line at Guildhall, *PC ZONE*, 9 Dallington Street, London EC1V 0BQ.

HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA

■ £24.99 (+ £8.99 monthly subscription) | Pub: Atari |
Dev: Artifact Entertainment | ETA: Out Now |
www.europe.istaria.com

REQUIRES PIII 850, 256MB RAM, GeForce2 card and a 56K modem
DESIRES PIII 1.8GHz, 512MB and a 128MB 3D card and a broadband connection

**Something of a withered aegis himself,
Paul Presley looks to the distance**



Nice hair, shame about the boat race.



Adajen Do Shar
<Drachentänzer>



If Tim Burton made games...

Just like having a real job. But without the misery.

HORIZONS then, The so-called *EverQuest* beater. Many, not least Atari, have put a great deal of faith in Artifact Entertainment's fantasy-themed MMOG, hoping that finally, the *EQ* behemoth will have a decent rival to lure them away from their five-year vacation from reality in Norrath. Unfortunately, aside from having better graphics, *Horizons* fails to deliver the goods on so many counts. It's a

poor *Fame Academy* to *EQ*'s all-conquering *Pop Idol*.

WORLD VIEW

The background? Well, it's always amusing to hear what sort of nonsense a MMOG comes up with to explain why the players in its world aren't able to permanently die. For *Horizons*, it's all to do with being part of a chosen sub-set of the populace, deemed by the fantasy gods to be vital to the forthcoming war against a malevolent force known as the Withered Aegis. Said force are spreading across the land, turning things green and spiky.

Nice idea, but it's clear from the outset that the developers haven't thought things through sufficiently. Case example: you can fall off the highest cliff (or floating rock thing), land on a river of molten fire and not even

flinch. Get slapped by a level one maggot however, and you lose health points quicker than an NHS hospital at the bottom of a league table. Inconsistency like this is rife throughout.

As is simplicity. But not in the good 'easy to use, lifetime to master' way. Career progression is very limited in terms of variety and personal customisation. Sure, there are a fair few 'jobs' to pursue, from tailor to conjurer, but the lack of variety within

each class means that everything has a samey feel to it. All wizards learn the same spells. All blacksmiths make the same items. And since everyone's doing the same things, the much heralded 'player-driven economy' amounts to precious little since there's nothing much to aim for.

In fact, there's a general sense of pointlessness to the whole game. Istaria may be one single 'zoneless' game world, but since so much of it is bereft of any content, there's little incentive to

explore any of it other than to find slightly harder respawning monsters to kill for level grinding purposes.

Even the major population areas feel barren. Tazoon, the central city at the heart of the world, is emptier than a politician's promise. Aptly enough, just as the Withered Aegis is spreading across Istaria, corrupting everything it touches, *Horizons*' lifelessness spreads across the whole game, infecting everything from content to gameplay.

SONY, SO FAR

So, does this game come with the usual caveat of 'wait a few months, see how things develop and give it another try'? Actually, no. *Horizons* has a problem far greater than its crippling lack of

IN PERSPECTIVE

EVERQUEST: NEW DAWN

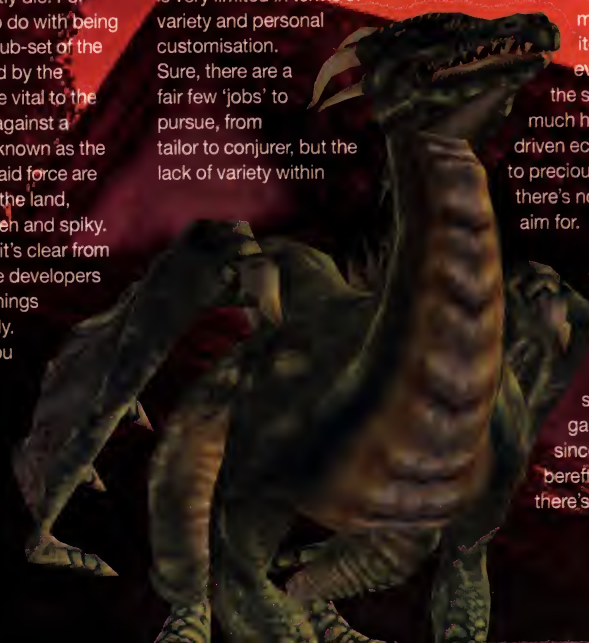
Reviewed Issue 125, Score 87%

It may be five years old now, but it's still the template on which all other MMOGs pattern themselves. Which is why most of them are going wrong.

ANARCHY ONLINE: SHADOWLANDS

Reviewed Issue 134, Score 80%

AO proved that for a MMOG to break free from the *EQ* straitjacket, it needs to be different. *Anarchy Online* is definitely that, and as such is worth every penny.





Some religions will accept anyone.

“True innovation comes at the core of a gaming experience, not from added fancy frills and flamboyant frippery”

purpose looming on the, er, horizon. You know how it seems like God himself is currently plaguing America with just about every natural disaster he can think of in order to punish it for being so naughty?

Well, unless one of those many fires, earthquakes, tropical hurricanes or flaming jet airliners totals the San Diego offices of Sony Online, *EverQuest II* should be popping out of the development womb before too long. And when it does, it'll decimate all that come before it, capturing the kind of market share that makes venture capitalists cry tears of joy. Which will render *Horizons*, along with other 'generic' fantasy MMOGs that fail to offer tangible gameplay alternatives, as useless as a condom salesman in the Vatican.

Horizons has a few ideas, sure. But what any developer worth his or her balsamic vinegar has to understand is that true innovation comes at the core of a gaming experience, not from fancy frills and flamboyant frippery added to the surface... Sorry, surface. Playable dragons sound great. But if all it means is an alternatively shaped avatar

instead of a fundamentally different approach to the player's actions, goals and encounters, then you might as well make everything 'playable' – from sheep to bricks – and pretend to offer more choice than ever.

ROLL UP, ROLL OFF

Not that you'll fool anyone for too long. *Horizons'* player communities and website forums are already starting to bemoan the lack of variety in game – along with the lack of attention Artifact seems to be paying to post-launch support. Bugs and server problems are one thing (and par for the course when it comes to MMOG launches it seems). However, leaving in broken quests, mostly empty cities and unbalanced levels of crafting resources from the beta tests is quite another.

Not responding to player queries and complaints also serves to further alienate the audience. Part of *EverQuest's* astounding endurance has been the way the development team interact with the people who pay their wages. It's what helped *Anarchy Online* survive its rocky opening – the feeling that we



I think the garden's flooded again.

were all, developers and gamers, in this thing together working for a greater good. Which is what, ultimately, we ended up with.

But as I said, it's doubtful as to whether *Horizons'* novelty sideshow has enough growth potential to be able to rival *EQII's* three-ring circus preparing to pitch its tent. The free market philanthropist in me wants to say yes, maybe it can hold its own. Unfortunately, the cynical realist in me just can't see it. Perhaps as a sort of 'starter' game for novices to the genre? 'My First MMORPG', if you will. Just be prepared to grow out of it before too long. **EQ**

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

PLAYER-BUILT COMMUNITIES PROVIDE ONE LONG-TERM GOAL AT LEAST

Horizons isn't totally bereft of interest. Hidden among the vast world are a number of pre-designated community areas filled with empty plots of land, all waiting for the right investor to come along. Buy a plot, gather enough materials and start to build the fantasy home of your dreams. Sarah Beeny would be proud.

The idea is that players will band together and form remote communities to help fight the spread of the Withered Aegis and to provide further trading opportunities. Unfortunately, because the content is all limited to pre-designed forms, this isn't quite as enticing as it sounds. Still, it's something to aim for at any rate.



An ideal fixer-upper.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Seamless 'non-zone based' world
- ✓ Player-driven world content
- ✓ In-game guild menus
- ✗ Dumbed down skill, control and levelling system
- ✗ Bereft of meaningful goals
- ✗ Sloppy ongoing support

68

EverQuest lite. Better looking but with half the taste



EVE ONLINE TECH II UPGRADE

■ £34.99 (plus \$12.95 monthly charge) | Pub: CCP |
Dev: CCP | ETA: Out Now | www.eve-online.com

REQUIRES PIII 600MHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB 3D card and a 56k modem
DESIRES PIII 1.0GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB 3D card and a broadband Internet connection

Richie Shoemaker hasn't left his front door for nearly a year. Here's why...



DESPITE the apparent popularity, the idea of playing a massively multiplayer online game is rather unappealing to the great majority of PC gamers. For many, there's a technological barrier to overcome, seeing as many increasingly require relatively expensive broadband connections to play them. Add to that the cost of monthly subscriptions and you have yourself a fairly expensive hobby – cheaper than getting pissed once a month, but expensive all the same. Especially when you take into account the amount of time required to even get a foothold in the universe to which you must subscribe.

However, *Eve Online* is unique in many ways: aside from the deep-space setting, *Elite*-inspired freewheeling gameplay, endlessly appealing graphics and the mouse-driven third-person interface, it's a game that can be played as often as you



Bronze: space metal of choice.

can ill-afford – once you've overcome its steep learning curve. Since skills can be trained offline, the laborious 'treadmill' is neatly sidestepped, while for the power-gaming fraternity, there are still plenty of ways to upend the efforts of the less time-affluent. And because the game is played across a single shard, *Eve* is alone among its peers as being truly international in flavour and the game world feels more alive and dynamic as a result.

CASTOR OIL

In the nine months since its release, much has changed in the world of *Eve*. Technical issues of lag and excessive downtime have been largely eliminated and gameplay imbalances are now minor.

With the release of the Tech II 'Castor' upgrade, there's a breadth of opportunity for trade, player combat and resource and business management. Plus, research, manufacture of the game's hundreds of tech items and even information servicing has meant that players now have a far greater wealth of gameplay styles to explore. Castor has

effectively ushered in an entirely new and intricately layered game.

Eve has evolved beyond being merely a detailed simulation of space-bound economics. Player-run corporations have banded together to form huge alliances that have laid claim to hundreds of outer-lying lawless systems. Those that favour PvP combat regularly haunt the trade lanes and warp gates, while those less inclined to engage in the game's

rich strategic combat flit about trying to earn a decent wage. *Eve* may not be the busiest online game, sadly, but for depth and tension it's without equal.

SCI-FI STYLE

If you'll allow me to divulge my own rather subjective views, I'm happy to admit that, having played *Eve* pretty much every day since it was released, it's by far the most enjoyable and attractive online game I've played. In fact, more than that,

it's definitely the most stylish and absorbing game I've played on a PC full stop. For sure, it can be a demanding game, early on especially. It can also be frustrating and at times terminally uneventful thanks to a faltering storyline. However, for all it's minor faults, there really is no experience as rich or rewarding. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

JUMPGATE: EPISODE II

Not reviewed

There aren't many other persistent world space-combat games available, but *Jumpgate*, despite its age, is still worthy of attention. If you prefer more traditional first-person combat played via a joystick, you may want to check it out at www.mightygames.co.uk

X2: THE THREAT

Reviewed Issue 138,
Score 92%

Although strictly single-player, even for the die-hard online gaming fan there's plenty to recommend in Egosoft's sci-fi sequel. Namely, the dynamic universe that often feels as if it's populated by real people.



Ooh, a giant space armadillo.



The big capital ships add some much needed, ahem, gravity to *Eve*.



"Ow! Bloody force fields..."

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Suits both the 'power' player and those with less time to spare
- ✓ Beautiful, stylish graphics and evocative soundtrack
- ✓ Mature and established player base
- ✓ Plenty to do within a highly evolved dynamic economy
- ✗ Deserves to be far more popular
- ✗ Learning curve is rather steep

91

Without equal



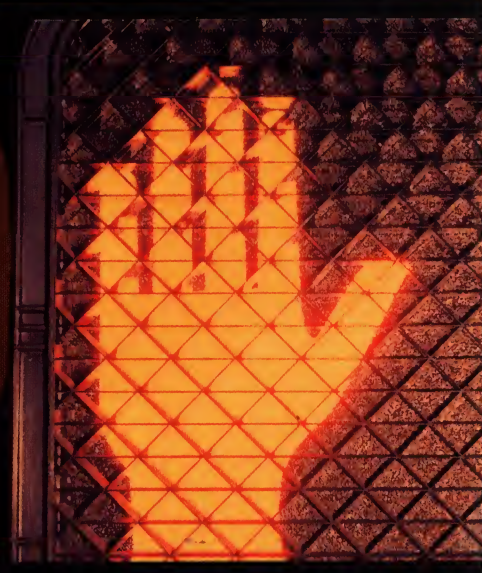
1972

Mikey and Jimmy know a hot deal when they see one.



2004

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PLANETSIDE: CORE COMBAT

■ £19.99 (plus \$12.95 monthly charge) | Pub:
Ubisoft | Dev: Sony Online Entertainment |
ETA: Out Now | www.planetside.com

REQUIRES PIII 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB DirectX 8.1 compatible 3D card,
56k modem, full copy of *PlanetSide*
DESIRES P4 1.6GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB DirectX 8.1 compatible 3D card,
broadband connection

**Richie Shoemaker bores his way
through *PlanetSide's* crust to
explore the first expansion pack**



Aliens don't believe in joining struts, apparently.

APPARENTLY there are people who enjoy being stuck in deep, dark, enclosed spaces. So popular is the pastime that there's a name for the poor soul who actively seeks out and explores these damp rocky crevices – a speleologist, or potholer to you and me. Quite why someone would rather spend their leisure time lost in the bowels of the Earth rather than take in a sunset on a mountain is beyond me.

Core Combat, the first add-on for *PlanetSide*, last year's 'massively multiplayer' FPS, does at least offer some sort of

treat for those willing to pay to visit its dark sweaty interior.

For the claustrophiliac shootist who's seen all Auraxis has to offer, there are six huge subterranean caverns to explore (although only two are 'active' at any one time in order to keep battles tight and focused). Each hides six ancient modules, yours to collect, power up and take to a topside facility. Install a module and you'll give your fellow troops a timely boost, from regenerating health and armour to increased damage output.

LET'S ROCK

While it would be a touch cruel to call *Core Combat's* subterranean design ugly, it's certainly the case that the levels are nowhere near as pleasing on the eye as the game's outdoor expanses. Conveyor belts of lava ape the flow of rivers, crystal structures stand glasslike and the rock looks suitably rocky as to convince you of your stony surroundings. In spite of the obvious



Anyone fancy a game of Ker-Plunk?



Zip lines, a one way journey to oblivion.



It must be important, it's glowing.

attempts to give the caves some variety however, it's all too easy to get utterly lost within them thanks to the network of 'zip' lines that cut across the caves.

These light-beam 'travelators' are designed to help you speed your way through the labyrinthine tunnels. Instead, it's pretty much a lottery where you'll end up. Dead, usually, since by the time you've discovered where you are, a cluster of Spitfire turrets will have locked-on

and begun sapping you of health. And if by some miracle you do manage to alight from the caves with a powered-up module, you'll be dead within seconds of appearing topside without a sizable escort anyway.

FLAILING WILDLY

Sadly, while the new weapons and vehicles are fun, they don't offer quite enough to make the process of getting access to *Core Combat's* supposed treasures feel that rewarding. The Flail has proven to be a minor hit with the grizzled *PlanetSide* vets, thanks to an absence of really decent artillery weapons until now.

But the others are just tweaked versions of items that already exist, with a fancy 'alien' sheen added. Ultimately, since *Core Combat's* best features can

be enjoyed by both the expanded and unexpanded players, you might as well let other mugs go to the expense of buying the pack and doing all the work required to gain them. Then you can just have all the fun and reap the rewards above ground. **PCZ**

INPERSPECTIVE

BATTLEFIELD 1942

Reviewed Issue 136, Score: 85%

Despite the lack of focus in the battles, *BF1942* is considerably cheaper than *PS*, unrelentingly popular and has favoured add-ons that piss over *Core Combat* from a great height.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Reviewed Issue 138, Score: 91%

UT does *PlanetSide* with the new Onslaught mode. The maps are smaller, the vehicles less numerous and the potential a wee bit smaller in scale, but the focused gameplay will have you believing otherwise.



PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Flail is a decent vehicle add-on
- ✓ Abilities boost most welcome
- ✓ You don't need to buy it to enjoy its best features
- ✗ Lingering issues not addressed
- ✗ New areas are dull
- ✗ Overcomplicates an already well-balanced game

49

Soiled

RIFTWAR: CAMPAIGNS V148



Does that mean you've now switched sides to the undead?

AT THE other end of the scale from the pie-eating über-mods comes the anorexic *Riftwar*, which relies on clever ideas to boost its potential beyond its tiny filesize. It's a three-way class-based battle between humans, aliens and the undead, with total domination of the universe being the ultimate prize. Each species has several classes, which vary your capabilities and weapons, along with power-ups specific to your species/class mix. *Riftwar* balances it all well, with no class given an obvious advantage.

The mod recently won Best Gametype in 2003's 'Make

Something Unreal' competition, getting plaudits for its blend of deathmatch and domination into a multi-map long-term campaign.

The battles are fought across three worlds – Earth, Earth R+2 (an 'alternate reality' Earth), and the alien world PX7-942 – with each world featuring four maps. Teams compete to win as many maps as possible to take control of other worlds, some maps being purely deathmatch and others featuring Rift Control points which have to be held by a team to win points. Win enough and you control a world; win all three worlds and your team wins overall. Simple.



SIZE 2MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Unreal Tournament 2003* (with bonus packs)

www.inkless.com/riftwar

The award-winning *Tony Lamb* meets an award-winning mod



Alien? Undead? She's still one hot little chick-a-dee.

Riftwar adds its own character models and weapons, and makes use of the built-in maps of *UT2003* and associated bonus packs. The linking of

worlds and maps into a campaign is a neat idea, giving each species a target to aim for. Online support is lamentable, but it'd make a fun LAN party game.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **71**

Original (and compact)

FRAG OPS V12 ALPHA



SIZE 175MB **REQUIRES** Full version of *Unreal Tournament 2003*

www.frag-ops.com

Tony Lamb upholds the law as *UT2003* has a go go go at *Counter-Strike*

LIKE FIREARMS for *Half-Life*, *Frag Ops* borrows heavily from the familiar *Counter-Strike* team fragfest model of terrorist vs counter-terrorist, only this time in the *UT2003* environment. Naturally, this gives it something of an advantage in the eye candy department, as *UT2003* provides lush graphics on a plate, and *Frag Ops* makes good use of this increased flexibility.

It's a semi-realistic mod, balancing the reality of true-to-life weapons and environments with cool ideas like special moves (crouched rolls and stunt dives for example), giving a more cartoon-like feel to the bloodletting. This means it appeals to both the in-ner-face adrenaline junkies and those

who prefer a more team stealth game. It all works damn well, with a great choice of weapons and add-ons (tac-lights, bayonets, scopes etc), a good selection of well-designed maps which blend close-quarter action with more open-air scrapping, and good character models – although so far there are only a handful to choose from. Bot support is good too, although they sometimes get a bit lost.

One thing that unfortunately does let *Frag Ops* down, though, is the zip installation. It works, but having a umod or a .exe file is so much cleaner and less likely to lead to problems. Hopefully this should be sorted out by the next version.

One the whole, *Frag Ops* is highly enjoyable. The sheer

range of weapons is a gun-nut's wet dream and with more maps and usable vehicles to come, there's a lot of potential.

**PCZONE
VERDICT** **79**

Frag rocks



Check those pythons. Hogan would be proud.



Attack of the clones.



Best to make sure.



The new Lancaster bomber. On fire. Yesterday.



The Germans get their own bomber to shoot down.

BATTLEGROUP42 V0.95



SIZE 606MB REQUIRES Full version of Battlefield 1942

www.battlegroup42.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

Group tactics ahoj as we send *Tony Lamb* to the slaughter

WHAT A monster this is. 606MB – but believe me when I say that BG42's size is justified. If you're after historical realism, fantastically detailed vehicles and gargantuan maps, then you're in for a treat.

The idea is to add new levels of detail and accuracy to the original BF1942, while maintaining its patented adrenaline-rush gameplay. And from the moment you first see the mod's informative loading screens, you know you've started something special.

For a start, all the standard maps have been tweaked so the

new vehicles appear on each one, making it great fun to re-fight them all with the new content. You could argue that some of the new maps (including Hungarian locales) may be a touch too big considering the time it takes to get back into the action if killed, and the need for lots of players to make them worthwhile. But they still play well and add a 'campaign' feel to the proceedings.

This aside, you can revel in the new vehicles and weapons (from all-new tanks to Lancaster Bombers), enjoy the huge new maps and historically-accurate

tweaks, grin as aircraft cough and splutter at low speed, and shrink with horror as those same aircraft prove far more difficult to handle. Blast the enemy to hell with mobile tank-killers. Sprint forward and call in air support with armoured vehicles. Defend fixed positions with new artillery. And then... Do it all again.

This is a top class mod, full of toys and wonderfully realistic. Install it now. Thank us later.



Texture detail is better across the board.



Not bad looking for a five-year-old engine.

FIREARMS V2.8



SIZE 143MB REQUIRES Full version of Half-Life

www.firearmsmod.com

TOTAL CONVERSION

Pass the ointment, as *Tony 'Hot Limbs' Lamb* feels the burn

HALF-LIFE might be drawing its pension, and *Firearms* queuing up for its free bus pass and denture fixative, but this much-loved member of HL's 'Most Venerable Mods Club' just refuses to give up the ghost. Now at version 2.8 and featuring more maps, skins,

weapons and other assorted treats than ever before, this is one of those essential mods that any self-respecting fan simply has to have.

Firearms is a realism mod, with an emphasis on teamplay rather than individual heroics. It's a bit like *Counter-Strike*, with red and blue teams choosing their weapons loadout before each match and then battling it out to the death, or until one team completes its mission objectives. Your skills improve as you progress thanks to the acquisition of skill points, making you more useful to your team the further you go. Another neat feature is the fact that if you get wounded, you have to bandage yourself to stop the bleeding.

There's no shortage of goodies in *Firearms*, with many

new maps and some, 30 new weapons, as well as a hearty selection of new skins and sounds to enjoy. It's a multiplayer-only mod though, so online or LAN play is the only option (lack of bot support being the weak point of so many *Half-Life* mods). However, *Firearms* is so well established now that there are still enough servers around to make for a good game.

Even though the *Half-Life* environment is starting to show its age now, *Firearms* still manages to look half-decent. Will it move on into *Half-Life 2*? Let's hope so.



No bots mean a lonely experience.



Draw, pardner.

Getting started in... EVERQUEST: LOST DUNGEONS OF NORRATH

LDON has taken *EverQuest* to dizzy new heights.

Chris Anderson shows you how to make the most of it



WHERE TO START

1 You'll be prompted after installation to return to your home town and talk to a specific NPC, who will in turn refer you to other NPCs at wayfarer camps. This is where you get your adventures. Note that whilst you can speak to your home town NPC at level 15, you can't start an actual adventure until you are level 20. Plus you'll need at least two other people with you. The minimum number of players you can take on an adventure is three, and the maximum is six. Obviously, larger groups can have a greater variety of classes and as such, have a much higher chance of success.



GET STONED

2 One NPC will give you an Adventurer's Stone, which is your key to requesting missions. It can also be improved as you earn adventure points by successfully meeting your goals. The Adventurer's Stone gives a small increase to stats – like saves versus magic – and is a nice item in itself. Your biggest upgrades will come from augmentations, which you buy with your adventure points from most merchants. Augmentations are upgrades to your existing equipment and, if you are persistent and earn enough adventure points, you can upgrade your character to a level you previously thought impossible.

TIME RESTRAINTS

3 *LDON* is geared towards casual players, offering a relatively quick way to set off on an adventure and gain loot and experience without having to hang around zones hoping for a pick-up group. There is a catch, however. You have a limited amount of time (90 minutes) in which to complete your adventure. Remember, it takes time to form a group and get everyone to the dungeon spot. Allow for this before you start and don't commit yourself unless you can stay till the end or you'll end up on your fair share of hate lists.

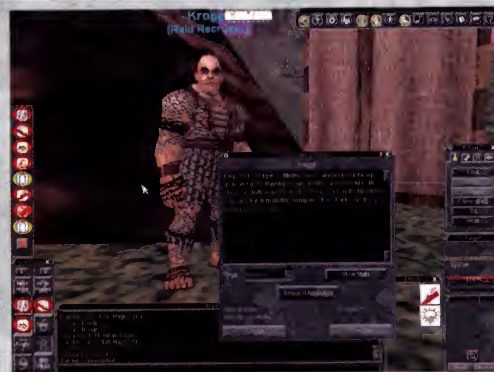


WINNERS AND LOSERS

4 As soon as your group leader chooses an adventure you can press Alt+V to get information on the task ahead of you, including the mission type and the location of the dungeon. If your adventure expires before you complete it, you can carry on anyway for a lesser reward. If some fool (such as your healer) takes off halfway through the mission and you fail, this goes down on your record as a 'loss'. Clearly, you don't want that to happen: choose your group members carefully.

TREASURE HUNT

5 There are many chests scattered throughout the dungeons, mostly offering poor to average levels of loot. You can get a small amount of experience from opening chests, and the chance something special might be lurking inside makes them all the more appealing. However, chests can contain traps and if you decide to open one while standing right beside a colleague with few hit points left, there will often be hilarious results. Don't miss this top opportunity for mid-adventure comedy. If you wish, you can opt to have a bard or rogue spoil all the fun by detecting and disarming traps as you go along.



GROUP MAKE-UP

6 You won't always be able to pick and choose your group members unless you are playing with friends or members of your own guild. Generally speaking though, an enchanter who has even a vague clue what he or she is doing will make your life a lot easier as you'll often be overrun by mobs whom they can pacify, making your task much less daunting. It won't hurt to bring a warrior or shadow knight along either, so they can hold foes up while you sit bravely at the back casting spells and other such nonsense.

HEALERS ARE YOUR FRIEND

7 Having an enchanter in your team is nice, but not totally essential, and having at least one strong tank in your team who can take flak will also help. It's not the end of the world though if you can't find players to fulfil these roles. However, while in general terms LDON doesn't require the classic group classes, embark on an adventure without a healer of some type and you will find yourself deader than a particularly dead dodo in no time at all. Healers: you need one.



WHICH ADVENTURE?

8 Most groups choose easy missions such as collecting a set amount of a particular item or just killing something outright. They do this for a reason: it's fast, easy, and uncomplicated, and is therefore a simple path towards levelling up. Of course you could take on something like a rescue mission which involves dragging an annoying and unco-operative NPC around with you, but if you want to get the most out of your adventure in terms of quick experience gain, greater levels of loot and maximum chance of 'winning', then keep things simple and you won't go wrong.



EASY STREET

9 If you find your adventures are too easy and you're not getting good experience, take a close look at the level of other players in your group. If you have lower level players with you, raise the difficulty of the adventure so you are fighting enemies reasonably close to your level and thus maximising experience. There are some who would argue that the adventure in itself is fun and experience is not as important. They are of course wrong. Repeat after us: über equals 'good'.

SETTING GOALS

10 LDON adventures are a quick, relatively easy way to get experience and loot, but in the long term the rewards are far more potent. Check the adventure merchants for augmentations you need for your class, and plan ahead so you collect as many adventure points as you need to get your next upgrade. Remember some items are 'tied' to certain wayfarer camps and can only be bought once you earn enough AP from the camp in question. At the end of the day, even simple dungeon hacks can serve a greater good.



Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Sony Online Entertainment
Website: www.lostdungeonsnofnorrath.com

COMMUNITY CHEST

OPERATION FLASHPOINT



James Lyon directs your attention to this camera light attachment. It's *Flashpoint*, see?

War ain't pretty. And neither are *Operation Flashpoint*'s graphics after an overlong tour of duty with only a couple of add-on packs to keep it company. Yet the cardboard vegetation and misshapen faces of yesterday's technology make no effort to obscure what's still one of the finest soldiering sims around – and one that's still going strong with new add-ons and utilities appearing on the web regularly.

Be warned, though. Most of the better stuff out there requires patching the game up to v1.94, which means owning the *Resistance* add-on pack. But that's the price you pay for prolonging this excellent shooter...



MARINE ASSAULT PACK (ADD-ON)

www.digitalgrenade.com/

This recently released pack offers finely detailed uniforms and weapons of the US Marines and Russian Naval Infantry. It's a fine example of the effort put into a labour of love that makes *Flashpoint* a richer communal experience. Brings a tear to your eye, doesn't it?



LEGA WARZ (MOD)

www.legawarz.com

That's not a spelling mistake. *Lega Warz* cunningly gets around the necessary legal complications of its building block contents by changing its last vowel. Ingenious, but it's still the same old plastic moulded bricks we know and love, and thus one of the more innovative and colourful multiplayer *OpFap* mods around.



OPF WATCH (UTILITY)

www.binarybone.com/opfwatch

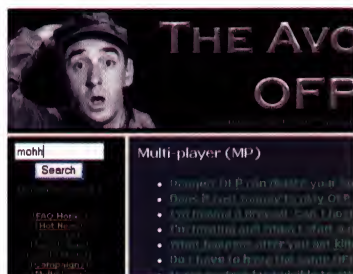
Here's a simple but convenient piece of software that monitors *OpFap*'s servers to see which are willing and able to play on without you constantly checking. It also automatically downloads and installs the required add-ons – which considering the confusing amount out there, isn't something to be scoffed at.



RTS-3 (MOD)

www.aggression.org/karr.html

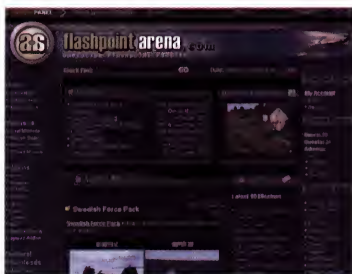
Release an editor for your FPS, turn around for a few years and chances are someone will be trying to shoehorn your game into a genre never thought of with surprisingly effective results. This download shows what can be done with a bit of programming when turning the mechanics of *OpFap* into a RTS.



AVON LADY'S OPF FAQ (FANSITE)

www.theavonlady.org/theopffaq

Flashpoint might not be the easiest game to understand. That's where the Avon Lady comes in, an eagerly helpful *OpFap* player who's more than happy to stockpile questions to help with your troubleshooting problems in a convenient manner. Check out the O/MTV section for a selection of game movies too.



FLASHPOINT ARENA (FANSITE)

ofp.action-arena.com

This is one of the better fansites to choose from, mainly as it does the job of listing all its downloadable missions and add-ons in handy tables. *Flashpoint Arena* tries to cover everything, so there should be enough here to fill in any gaps in your upgrading, though OFPEC (right) does the same thing.



OFPEC (TUTORIALS)

www.ofpec.com/editors

If you've ever wanted to edit your own missions, then the place they call the *Operation Flashpoint* Editing Centre is literally as good a place to start as any. Hundreds of tutorials covering almost every aspect of the game, plus various scripts to ease off the pains of creating something decent.



1982: FLASHPOINT IN THE FALKLANDS (MOD)

falklands.ofpr.com

It's not entirely finished yet, but the prospect of starting up a bit of Argy-bargy once more has got us slightly interested. For the impatient, though, there's still the chance of downloading ready-made vehicles and weapons to see how much progress the developers are making.

STEVE HILL'S NEVERQUEST

Anyone for golf? Steve Hill has a round with Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

GOLF: the great leveller. Enjoyed by statesmen and stoners alike, it's an infuriating blend of frustration and satisfaction. Get it right and it seems exquisitely simple; foul it up and you may find yourself taking a nine-iron to the foliage (as the denizens of my local pitch and putt course will attest). There are few things more capable of evoking raw hatred than the inability to control a small white ball with a metal stick, and a torrent of foul and abusive language is rarely more than a scuffed putt away.

LOOKING GOOD...

Naturally, the same principles apply to the PC incarnation of the sport, as represented by Tiger Woods' latest money-spinner. However, in its favour, it doesn't close for the winter and you can find someone to play you at four in the morning. What's more, you don't need to be a lifelong member of the Conservative party to get on the course, and it's not compulsory to dress like a twat.

Following a swift practice round to find my swing, I

venture into the game's online mode and soon find a match-up. I'm making up a three-ball with a pair of characters labouring under the sobriquets 'refdrew' and 'parforcourse74'. For obvious reasons of geographical location, they'll hitherto be referred to as Quebec and Alabama.

SWINGERS

A friendly nine-hole awaits and despite breezing through the practice round, I'm already feeling the pressure on the tee. There's a saying in golf, 'drive for show, putt for dough', and rarely has this been better demonstrated than on the first

Alabama. When I concede my virgin status he turns ugly, bluntly stating: "You need to go practice at a higher level." He sinisterly adds: "I'm serious. Grrr." Plainly ignoring him, I claw back a semblance of respectability at the second, baiting him with "who needs to practice?" as he flounders in the rough.

Quebec, meanwhile, is keeping himself to himself, chipping in only to offer cloying congratulations to Alabama for virtually every shot. In fact, much of the game seems to be an exercise in washing each other's bones, trading abbreviations such as "nd",

"As I run up a cricket score, the rising anger can almost be felt across the Atlantic"

hole. While I manage to find the green with relative ease, my 11-putt is frankly embarrassing and does little to thaw relations with my new found buddies.

"First time to play?" offers the man from Birmingham,

"np" and "ns", presumably short for "nice drive", "nice putt" and "nice shoes".

Unsurprisingly, very few of those compliments are aimed in my direction, and as I proceed to run up a cricket score, the rising anger can almost be felt across the Atlantic. Lag issues don't help matters, and Alabama screams "just hit the ball dude", while I'm barely limbering up. His advice on the putting green is scarcely more useful, fuming "tap it tap it tap it!" as I over-run by 20ft for the third time.

Small talk is kept to a minimum, although one of them

does inquire as to what I'm doing up in the early hours. When I tell them I'm reviewing this game, there's a tangible shift in attitude and they begin to treat me with a modicum of respect.

WATER SHOT

It doesn't last though, and when I hook a tricky tee shot into the drink, Alabama ungraciously mocks "splish splash I was taking a bath" – something he admits is a rare occurrence in the deep South. Truly, he is the man who put the 'ming' in Birmingham. Even through the medium of a pretend golf game, he manages to come across as a nasty little redneck, something that's hilariously reflected in his avatar's attire, with his *King Of The Hill* visor and tightly trimmed chin-glove.

Quebec, meanwhile, is a fairly insipid slaphead, as mirrored by his personality. This consists largely of responding to everything Alabama says with "lolllllllllllllllll", a phrase I understand to mean that he's laughing very loudly.

I manage to crack him up myself when, after taking a barrage of criticism for another shanked shot, I admit to my fellow players that I'm drinking. It's no word of a lie, as I'm punctuating each hole

with a cheeky swig of Chardonnay, something that certainly makes this pair of arseholes more bearable.

It's not a sentiment that's reciprocated though, and as my game becomes more wayward, their rage becomes more apparent, with Alabama barking that he "hasn't got all night". I, on the other hand, have got all night, and continue to potter round at my own pace, running up a score more akin to a snooker break.

With the game dragging into its second hour (and me considering a second bottle), they both appear to be at breaking point and I sense some muttering behind my back. Now some 30 shots over par, I approach the final hole with a swagger. They both silently disconnect. I win. [X]



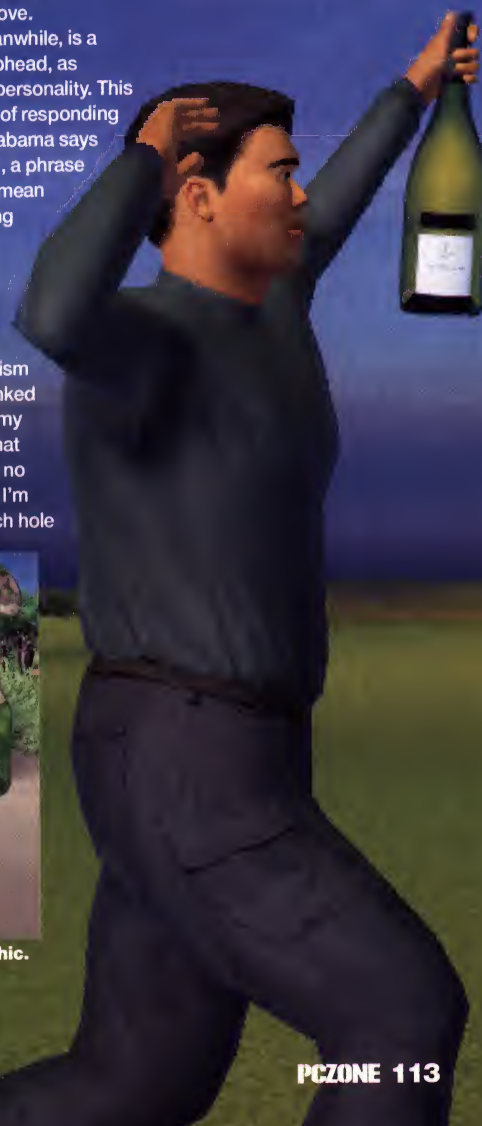
It's four in the morning, but it's still light outside.



The golf course can be a lonely place.



The visor. The pleated trousers. Ah, the splendour of golfing chic.



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HARDWARE

ALL THE LATEST NEWS AND REVIEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PC HARDWARE

CLEAN AWAY



■ **PROJECTING HIMSELF** Phil Wand

▲ I'm not sure it's happened before, but every product on review this month exceeded my expectations by a considerable margin.

The two Belkin peripherals, the N32 Game Mouse and N50 SpeedPad, looked as though they'd go the same way as the Razer Boomslang and be a whole lot more style than function. But having played a wide variety of first-person games with the two devices, plus a liberal dose of *C&C: Generals*, *Total Annihilation* and late-night *iSketch*, I can tell you that both proved their worth.

The mouse doesn't quite make recommended grade because of the outlay required to get it working and the fact it ain't optical, but the SpeedPad was a genuine surprise. It makes your play smoother and faster, and these are two attributes that can do wonders for your score.

And what about the ViewSonic Projector? Who wants a projector? Well, I can tell you: everyone does. I've seen all my DVDs again. I've played *Tekken Tag Tournament* at 4am and I've even resurrected my Sega Saturn for a *Bombberman* tournament. *Desert Combat*, the world's most popular modification for *Battlefield 1942*, is simply jaw-dropping and other high-adrenalin titles such as *Unreal Tournament* leave you panting for breath. Even the BBC news takes on a whole new dimension.

So if you've got a grand to spare and a decent-sized room, the ViewSonic will mash your brain and send you to bachelor heaven...

"Your PC is about to get one helluva makeover. Pretty much everything is set to change"

INTRODUCING... THE 2004 PC

Your PC is about to get better – much better. Check out the changes coming your way over the next 12 months

PSU

Bigger power supplies to meet the demands of modern processors and all the hungry devices and peripherals that are connected to them. You'll also see higher airflow and integrated electronics to guard against spikes and surges.

CASE

Balanced Technology eXtended, better known as picoBTX, microBTX and plain BTX, will between them replace all shapes and sizes of ATX. Cases and motherboards will be redesigned to cope with the stresses of modern hardware, with strict cooling guidelines. You'll not see PS/2, serial or parallel ports. You'll hardly recognise your PC!

CPU

You'll see a 775-pin Prescott from Intel this year (up from the current 478), plus a 939-pin AMD chip. And they'll get hot.

COOLING

A major part of the BTX specification involves proper cooling. Quieter, cooler kit will make living with your PC easier.

AGP & PCI

PCI Express blows both PCI and AGP out of the water in terms of speed, but you'll need to update all your cards. And get ready for a new range from NVIDIA and ATI!

FLOPPY DISK

Already, many big name manufacturers omit floppy drives from their machines.

MOBO

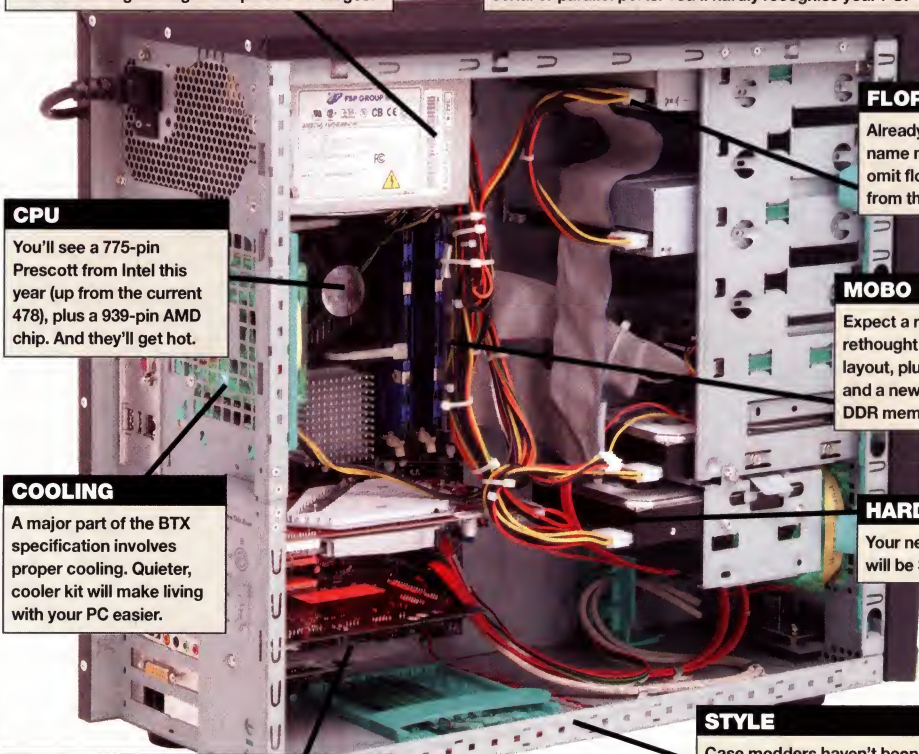
Expect a radically rethought motherboard layout, plus PCI Express and a new design of DDR memory.

HARD DISK

Your next hard drive will be SATA.

STYLE

Case modders haven't been forgotten in the BTX specification, so get ready for cold cathode, window heaven.



AS YOU CAN see from the image above, your PC is about to get one helluva makeover. Pretty much everything, from the CPU to the case, is set to change at some point this year. Leaps in video card and processor power, plus the widespread use of multiple hard drives, CD and DVD burners, means that Intel has had to take cooling very seriously. The result of its thinking is the new BTX form factor. Its guidelines require that motherboards and cases undergo drastic changes in order to sustain the

current level of technological advances. In simpler terms, ATX can't cope, and along with AGP, PCI, PS/2, serial and parallel, it'll be a dim and distant memory by Christmas. And you'll find that some of the changes that have been happening over the last 12 months, such as the move from CRT to LCD, the upgrade of Ethernet from 100MB to Gigabit, and the extinction of floppy disks, will gather considerable pace. So hang onto your hats, it looks to be an exciting ride.

**118****REVIEWS**

A mighty mouse and more

**121****REVIEWS**

Make your games huge!

**122****DEAR WANDY**

Solutions to go, 24/7

**126****BUYER'S GUIDE**

Going shopping? Look here first

Getting High

Finally, a move to up the video quality of consumer products

YOU MAY NOT know it, but TVs are crap. With only 576 lines visible on a PAL display, the image quality is substantially less than a 15-inch monitor – those of you who've run an S-Video cable from the back of your video card to a television will be all too aware of its limitations.

This year, some big names are hoping to change all that. Hitachi, Panasonic, Philips, Sony, Thomson, Toshiba, and Silicon Image have created a new interface which links an AV source to its output, uncompressed, making for digital high-definition video and multi-channel audio in one cable. The standard also features secure High-Bandwidth Digital Content Protection (HDCP), which in turn is supported by Hollywood studios, cable and satellite providers. Besides the obvious jump in quality and the benefits of pushing all information down a single wire, the interface transmits non-visual information between HDMI-capable technology, too – for example allowing the television to know and even control when a DVD begins playback.

HIGH DEFINITION GAMING

HDTV has been around for a while. I recall seeing a High-Definition TV at a show some years ago and being stopped in my



Hi-def products are coming to market now. This Panasonic is a 32-inch LCD with SD memory card slot, built-in photo viewer, a PC card slot, plus HDMI input.

tracks. Now that key manufacturers are pushing the HDMI interface through its integration into DVD players, set-top boxes and screens, it should mean that an increasing number of living rooms will become high-definition. And while we can't know what all this will mean for gamers, who have had to rely on bridge converters and PowerStrip to play on a

big screen, as soon as big names like Microsoft update their Media Center products to adopt new standards and we start seeing home theatre PCs with HDMI, an evening's entertainment spent playing your favourite games with the whole family is suddenly a very plausible idea. It sure beats the hell out of watching BBC and ITV.

SNIPPETS**GLORY WHOLE**

Based on the VIA Glory Personal Gaming Console platform, the ApeXtreme may sound like some sort of weird cyber-baboon developed by the US military, but the set-top console recently won the CES 2004 Innovation Award. While underpowered (a 1.5GHz processor paired with an S3 card isn't exactly exciting) and doomed to failure, the product is attempting to bring PC games to sitting rooms with DirectX 9 graphics, 5.1 surround sound, DVD playback, audio jukebox and a hundred other features that won't tempt Sony fans away from their PlayStations. It should allow a small number of people without PCs to play PC games, but only if it's priced right. www.via.com.tw

A LITTLE BIT MORE

ABIT Computer Corporation, manufacturer of our Editor's Choice Intel motherboard, has recently announced plans to expand its AMD range of products with new NVIDIA nForce3 boards. Those of you sniffing around 64-bit Athlon chips would be advised to hold off until ABIT's offerings appear in stores. On a related note, the company also announced it would offer ATI video cards (who isn't these days?), and is currently tooling up for Loki, the successor to the current Radeon. www.abit.com.tw

JUST DIE

January 16, 2004 was a day I'd marked on my calendar – it was when Microsoft stopped supporting Windows 98. Those of us who upgraded away from the world's worst operating system will retch at the news that Redmond has just announced its support will continue through to 2006. The decision comes in a move to help developing nations, who still rely on early Windows versions, and to make the company's upgrade cycle clearer. www.microsoft.com

**SPAM NO MORE**

Latest version of Eudora eats all spam

If you're fed up with junk mail, the latest version of Qualcomm Eudora should haul you out of the mire. I've been using Eudora since it was released for the Mac, and although the PC version is 'system intensive', there's no application quite like it. Version 6.1 adds a must-have feature called JunkWatch, which uses a rules-based scoring system to rank incoming messages: a low score means it's clean, a high score means it's spam. And it works. I receive more than 200 messages a day, of which 90 per cent are offers to pump up my wanger with a miracle cream. Eudora 6.1 means I never have to read that crap any more. www.eudora.com

DRIVER WATCH

**Need a patch? Take a look to see if you're behind the times****MOTHERBOARD**

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Intel	Software Installation Utility	5.1.1.1002	12 Dec 03	1.4MB	support.intel.com NEW
NVIDIA	Forceware	3.13	3 Nov 03	12.9MB	www.nvidia.com
SIS	AGP	1.1.7	7 Oct 03	5.4MB	download.sis.com
VIA	Hyperion	4.51	2 Dec 03	1.4MB	www.viaarena.com

GRAPHICS

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
ATI	Display, Control Panel, WDM	CATALYST 3.10	17 Dec 03	22.5MB	www.ati.com NEW
NVIDIA	Detonator FX	53.03	9 Dec 03	8.5MB	www.nvidia.com NEW

SOUND

MANUFACTURER	NAME	DESC	RELEASED	SIZE	WEB
Creative	EAX 4.0 ADVANCED HD Update	EAX4DRV	19 Nov 03	13.8MB	uk.europe.creative.com
M-Audio	Revolution	5.10.00.0051	06 Oct 03	10.1MB	m-audio.com NEW

NOSTROMO USB GAME MOUSE N30

GAME MOUSE

■ Price: £32 | Manufacturer: Belkin | Phone: 00 800 2235 5460 | www.belkin.co.uk

Time to shake hands with Belkin's chunky rodent

THE N30 is a reassuringly solid, three-button wheel mouse with force feedback and a 'cutting edge' button layout. The centre clicker has been moved from under the wheel to a wing above your thumb. This prevents accidental scrolling in the middle of battle and dictates that, not only must you retrain your fingers, but you must also be right-handed. Then again, left-handedness is the sign of a contract with Beelzebub and anyone so afflicted should seek the help of a priest.

Unlike the Razer Boomslang 2100 (issue 134, 73%), the more conventional ergonomics of the N30 means your hand clamps into place almost instantly, the thumb button feeling more natural than it looks. The scroll wheel is nicely ratcheted too, and the added weight from the feedback engine gives the

mouse considerable mass. It's great for a sniper's rifle, but it has a little too much inertia for twitch shooters.

TouchSense, the N30's trump card, makes the device shake, rattle and roll depending on what you're doing – and it'll even dance a jig in your palm as you guide the cursor around the desktop. And yes, that's as distracting as it

sounds. On higher settings, the mouse rocks enough for you to lose aim and click on the wrong icons, but you can disable it.

It works best when you're playing games, but it's here that the first doubts arise. Few first-person titles support

TouchSense, and more popular names like *Half-Life* require modding before they come to life – no thanks. OK, so a utility called TouchWare Gaming avoids this by monitoring your soundcard to



determine how the mouse should vibrate, and it works – but at £20 it's two-thirds the cost of the hardware (and like a porn star, doesn't come in the box).

I should also point out that the XP installer is broken, and that Belkin makes no mention of this fact. Only after hunting around other people's websites does it become clear what's wrong. Why Belkin can't cover this in a FAQ is anyone's guess – it would have saved me installing the device and its software on two separate PCs before deciding it was Belkin's problem and not mine. So if you're sold on the N30, be warned.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Solid construction and documentation
- ✓ TouchSense a worthy addition to action games
- ✗ Old fashioned, non-optical pickup
- ✗ Hideous XP install issues

78

A supreme quality product, if slightly unconvincing

NOSTROMO USB SPEEDPAD N52

SPEEDPAD

■ Price: £32 | Manufacturer: Belkin | Phone: 00 800 2235 5460 | www.belkin.co.uk

Get better at your games without lifting a finger

LIKE THE Game Mouse, the N52 is made from high-calibre materials and is a pleasure to hold and use. Indeed, if you were to compare the plastics of the SpeedPad with the bastard cheap interior of a Mercedes S Class or a BMW 5 Series, a car I sat in recently out of curiosity at its ugliness, the N52 is miles out front in the quality stakes. It beats me how a 'prestigious' car manufacturer like DaimlerChrysler or BMW can use manifestly sub-standard crap on the dashboards of 50-grand cars, when companies such as Belkin and Saitek show more attention to detail in peripherals costing a thousand times less. Bizarre.

Anyway, you've got the idea it feels nice. Does it work? I'm happy to report that it does. Unlike the N30, there are no installation woes – run the install,

push the connector into a spare USB hole and you're away. The software bundle includes an intuitive profile manager which enables you to create custom button layouts and then assign them to different games. The default suits *Battlefield 1942* perfectly, with no tweaking required – I suspect that someone at Belkin is a fan of the game.

The SpeedPad works by translating pressed buttons into single or multiple key presses. With 14 keyboard-style buttons, an eight-way directional pad, two thumb buttons and a mouse wheel all within a

finger's reach, you can assign every possible action by recording keystrokes and complex macros, and then triggering them from the SpeedPad

without so much as lifting your wrist. In no time at all, you'll find yourself reacting quicker and playing better. Additionally, there are four shift



modes which quadruple the number of assignments you can have, bringing the total to, oh, I don't know... Plenty.

There are two things standing in the way of classic status. The first is that it's yet another 'thing' to have on your desk, along with a keyboard, mouse, joystick, speakers, wine gums and whatever else you need to play.

The second is unfamiliarity. While it looks like a quarter-size keyboard, it still demands that you change your brain to take full advantage of the layout. Put simply, sheer laziness will deter most of us from buying into the idea. Which is a shame, because the N52 has genuine potential.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Top quality build, great manual
- ✓ As logical as it is comfortable
- ✓ Boggling range of button assignments
- ✗ Design biased towards righties

84

A well-made and surprisingly effective gaming tool



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VIEWSONIC PJ550

■ Price: £999 | Manufacturer: ViewSonic | Phone: 01293 643900 | www.viewsonic.co.uk

Let's be honest folks, bigger is always better

IF YOU were born and raised in the early 1970s, the sight, sound and smell of a projector should bring back a number of fond memories. Along with John McCrirrick's sideburns and a Bodie & Doyle-style brown leather jacket, '70s dad had at least two projectors hidden around the house. One would be brought out to show Uncle William's wedding (complete with mum's shadow pointing at all the dead relatives), the other would be used for regurgitating last year's trip to Great Yarmouth. The colours were bleached, the hairstyles were terrible and the only sound was that of the projector and of dad cursing at the darkness when the lamp blew.

My, how things have changed. Although considerably more expensive than its forebears, the ViewSonic PJ550 is from a far more modern era. It's about the size of a hard cover dictionary, has inputs for RGB, S-Video and composite and boasts a native pixel resolution of 1024x768.

What's more, it's bright enough to use in a room with the curtains open and has a lamp life

PROJECTOR



image in the event that the unit isn't square-on with the screen; and whisper mode, which cuts the speed and noise of the cooling fan by reducing the output of the lamp.

BEST TOY EVER?

Although DVDs are a treat (my *James Bond* boxset loved the big screen), the PJ550 excels at gaming and particularly at first-person shooters. The *Desert*

Oil Rigs (one of the maps) induces genuine fits of vertigo, such is its grand scale, and the small, street-fighting maps around Basrah make everyone nervous enough to spill their drinks and be excused. Put simply, a whole wall filled with life-size adversaries, action and explosions makes the game

images will highlight some very basic limitations. It also needs a lot of space and isn't cheap – replaceable, non-warranty parts are major money. You also need a proper screen (see below) and a room with blinds or thick curtains for the best results.

Then again, if you have a decent DVD collection, a PC and a PlayStation, your own big screen is a very memorable experience, especially when shared with friends. And now projectors have dropped from the daft money they were a couple of years ago, it's within reach of many wallets.

"A wall filled with life-size adversaries, action and explosions makes the game come alive"

of 2,000 hours. There are also a number of neat features you find when remote-controlling up and down the on-screen menus. One such is digital keystone correction, which enables you to adjust the vertical shape of the

Combat mod for *Battlefield 1942* is my favourite, and also the best way to demonstrate the projector. Bank sharply high above the sweeping dunes of El Alamein, and anyone in the room unconsciously leans with you.

come alive. When you quit back to the desktop and put the lights on, you feel drained. Fantastic.

However, don't go thinking that a projector can replace your PC monitor. To start, it's not of an adequate resolution, and complex



They're shiny and new, but remember – these babies cost £250 to replace.

PCZONE VERDICT

- ✓ Build, packaging, documentation, 3-year warranty
- ✓ The most fun you can have sitting down
- ✓ Adult entertainment possibilities
- ✗ Cost of spare parts (eg – lamps are £250)

84

Not cheap, but a major impact on films and games

SILVER SCREEN SURFER

LIKE A COMPUTER NEEDS A KEYBOARD, SO A PROJECTOR NEEDS A SCREEN

Projectors don't like paint. Hint of summer fruit, or whatever poncy name Dulux gave the orange sloop on the walls in my lounge, was not an ideal canvas for games or movies. Skin tones were a little too David Dickinson for comfort, and on a bright day there wasn't enough light reflected back for me to work out what the hell was going on.

Any alternative I chose, from the garage door to the whiteboard in my office, wasn't right either. The whiteboard image had a distracting sheen to it, like a flash gun bouncing off a fat bird's arse; the garage door idea, meanwhile, caused pedestrians to wander off the pavement into speeding cars.

I went in search of a purpose-built affair with a matt surface. There's a surprising range on offer these days, from small, cine-style tripods you can buy in any high street camera store (between £50

and £150), to Odeon-rivalling cliff faces (from £200 upwards). Naturally, it had to be upwards.

Motorised versions seem practical but are permanent fixtures, and I really didn't like the idea of the screen being nailed to the ceiling in case I wanted to lug the gear round to a mate's house for a night of McDonald's and life-size *Tekken* (thoroughly recommended, by the way).

Having discounted the deluxe Insta Theater screens on the basis that I hadn't got enough money, I settled on the 6ft-across Movielux portable, which is a long tube that you erect by unrolling its innards towards the roof. It's an absolute monster, steady on its feet and at £230 is reasonably priced alongside the 'pro cinema' competition. I bought it late afternoon from www.av4.co.uk and it arrived the very next day.



Don't shoot!



DEAR WANDY

Every month our resident quack reads your letters and solves your problems. Think you know better? Write in with a top tip and win yourself £50...

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LET IT ALL OUT

Share your techie or gaming-related problems with us and in turn, we may well share them with thousands of readers via these very pages in a big communal love-in type thing. If you have any **top tips** to share with the group, then send them in too: if Wendy's impressed, he'll print them and send you £50 for your trouble.

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Email Address your letters to us at wandy@dearwandy.com with the subject heading 'Dear Wendy'. Please note: while we can assure you that we read absolutely every techie query sent to us, we are unable to offer personal replies. Sorry.

NEED MORE DATA

Q As a seasoned reader of your pages, I've read about the many issues that PC owners face by having such a diverse range of hardware. I also note that retailers of pre-built PCs are very slack when it comes to supplying customers with anything that gives detailed information on the hardware inside their computers. This makes it difficult to ensure things like drivers are kept up to date – the motherboard and other key components are rarely specified.

Therefore my question is this: how do I find out my motherboard and BIOS specifications to make sure they're up to date? How do I find out the exact specifications of my memory, such as what type etc? Can this be found out just by something on my computer telling me, or do I have to spend hours on the phone trying to get hold of someone who might be able to tell me?

James Funnell

Could you prove your microwave wattage or the cubic capacity of your car? Confirming PC specs is easier, but not for first-time buyers.



"How do I find out my motherboard and BIOS specifications in order to make sure they're up to date?"

A Over the Christmas period, my brother took delivery of a new PC. The first thing he did was lob it in the back of his car and drive it over to Wendy HQ – like most buyers, he had no idea if he'd taken delivery of what he'd ordered. And that's true of so many complex things these days. Could you prove the wattage of your microwave, or the cubic capacity of your car?

Unless you're a professor with a beard, it's highly unlikely – and like everyone else, all you have to go on is what came out of the salesman's

mouth when you bought it.

When it comes to peeking under the hood of your PC, there are many ways to skin a cat (and speaking as

someone who prefers dogs, there aren't nearly enough).

Motherboard information can be had from your machine's POST screen – basically, the bright white text when you first turn it on – and a visit to the BIOS set-up will reveal a lot more, including memory configuration. If you don't fancy rebooting, basic system details can be had from Microsoft's System Information console (press WINKEY+R and then type msinfo32). However, to delve a little deeper, you need a tool that does a little more digging.

Back in August, a chap called Tom Bowerman sent me a link to AIDA32 from www.aida32.hu, a freeware utility providing comprehensive hardware and nicely formatted reports. Because I'd always used SiSoft Sandra, I didn't give it much thought. I'm happy to report that, having used AIDA32 to double-check the details of my brother's new system, I've warned to its clear-cut interface. On top of



James Williams's MSI K7N2 Delta is taking a ridiculously long time to start up. What's gone wrong then?

the boot delay, but is there any way of fixing it?

James Williams

A Take a strong rap on the knuckles for the benchmarking problem – it's the number two entry on the 3DMark2001 FAQ, at www.futuremark.com.

It says: "We've noticed this behaviour and the solution is easy. Uninstall 3DMark2001 SE, download the latest version (build 330) if you don't have it already, reboot and install 3DMark2001 SE again." If you haven't done that already, the latest build is on our cover DVD.

Regarding the boot delay, I'm pretty sure this is another easy fix. Preboot eXecution Environment (PXE) is a method of booting a PC without a hard disk or removable boot device – typically from a network.

Like you, I run an Athlon system based around the MSI K7N2 Delta, and can reproduce the error message and the frustrating delay by selecting 'LAN' as one of the boot devices in the BIOS.

To fix this, press DEL to enter BIOS set-up when your machine starts up, select the Advanced BIOS Features menu and make sure that the 1st, 2nd and 3rd (don't you love Engrish?) boot devices are either disabled or set to something relevant, such as a floppy or CD-ROM. You should then be back on the fast track.

that, it's more of a 'no-nonsense' product than Sandra and a significantly smaller download. If everyone made it their New Year's resolution to include an AIDA32 report with every letter they sent me, I'd be a very happy man.

PC PALAVER

Q I'm having a couple of problems with my new PC, the first with 3DMark2001 SE. When I try and run it, I'm told that I "require DirectX 8.1". Now, I already have DirectX 9.0b on my PC, and I can't go overwriting it. Help! I'm desperate to know if my hard-earned dosh has been well spent, and for me 3DMark2001 is the best indication of this (if I get a score under 15,000, I shall be a tad miffed to say the least!)

The second problem is that every time I boot up, it takes a ridiculous amount of time before it gets to the XP Pro loading screen – perhaps twice as long as my work PC, which has less than half the spec.

I have an MSI K7N2 Delta with a 3200+ Athlon, 1GB RAM plus a SATA hard drive. During the boot checks the NVIDIA Boot Agent 2.0 displays the following message after about 12 seconds of seemingly doing nothing: "PXE-E61: Media Test Failure: Check Cable." I suspect that this failure is at the root of

"For £50 more than a 9600 Pro, I have an effective 9800 Pro happily chewing away at anything I throw at it – Max Payne is amazing"

STOP, CRACKLE AND POP

Q I was just reading issue 137 of *PC ZONE* when I came across Dean Heit's problems with his sound crackling and popping during games. The advice you gave him about using the onboard sound was good, but if he wants to use his Live! card, I have some other advice.

This exact problem happened to me, only I put a new video card in. After some experimenting, I finally found the problem. I think the answer Dean may be looking for is a good quality PSU unit. I invested in a high-power replacement and, hey presto, the crackling stopped. Hope this helps.

Chris Harding

A PC power demands have grown exponentially over the last couple of years, with CD writers, USB devices, cooling fans, yet more cooling fans and juicy video cards all drawing a wash of current from the PSU. Certainly, your soundcard can be helpful in identifying a failing supply, because unlike other components you get to hear it complaining. Anyway, thank you for writing in. If Dean is still stuck, perhaps your experience might help him out of a hole.

PORT CHASER

Q I'm an avid player of *Chaser* online, among other titles, and am desperate to host my own games. Although the IP address I get from my ISP is dynamic rather than static, it's always the same, and I'm told this is all I need.

However, when I create a server in *Chaser*, as far as I can tell no-one else can see my server, even though I've looked from another machine on my network at home and all seems okay. I'm running an Alcatel four-port router with only two PCs connected, and I use Norton Internet Security 2002. Could the

Symantec firewall be stopping other players from seeing my server? Please help!

Doug Kieran

A To start with, you don't need a static address to host an online game. A fixed IP means that, if you're looking to run a server 24/7, its location never changes and players can bookmark it in The All-Seeing Eye (or GameSpy, if they're old-school and dense). A dynamic IP is preferable for most 'security oblivious' home users, as it makes them less of a target for hackers – changing IP address can be likened to changing your phone number to avoid nuisance callers.

Now although you say that your address is "always the same", if you're not paying for a static IP, or it isn't mentioned anywhere in your contract, I guarantee that the lease on it will eventually time out. You can always use a service such as DynDNS.org which allows you to assign a name (such as dougkieran.dyndns.org) to your current address, and to have it update itself whenever it changes.

But back to the reason you wrote in. Any server will 'bind' itself to a port on the host machine, and in the case of *Chaser*, that port is defined in

ServerConfig.def which comes with the server software.

Look in the file for the entry beginning Set "HostPort" – the number after it is the port your PC will use to talk to anyone connected to it. If you're running Internet Security on the host machine, there's a high chance that it will be barring the port *Chaser* is trying to use, and if you're not, there's a lesser chance that the Alcatel box may have some rudimentary blocking options that are preventing the flow of traffic. Remember that you also have to configure the router's SUA or NAT to forward traffic past the router to the machine running the game – otherwise, once data arrives at your phone socket, how's it going to know the destination?

Let's take an example. If you set the host port in ServerConfig.def to 3000, and start the server on a machine with an IP of 192.168.0.1, you'll need to include a rule in the router's NAT options to forward all requests received on port 3000 to 192.168.0.1. It's perplexing at first, but once you get your head around it, it's straightforward. If you still end up stuck, check the *Chaser* forums at the JoWood web site, www.chasergame.com



The 9800SE can be turned into a 9800 Pro with a freely available softmod. But Hercules isn't making this card any more, so you'll need to be quick if you want one too.

IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

SPEEDY SOLUTIONS, DIRECT FROM DR PHIL

Q I have an 800MHz Duron with 320MB RAM and a SiS 630/730 graphics card. I bought *Black Hawk Down* and it only runs on the lowest resolution. When I shoot, white squares flash out. What's the problem?

Adam Matthews

A Your system doesn't meet the minimum requirements set by the game. To play at a better resolution, you need at least a 1.5GHz processor and a beefier video card.

Q My PC is in need of a new hard drive, but I'm confused by what's on offer. What's the difference between IDE, SCSI, UDMA, and SATA? And more importantly, what will work on my PC? I've got an old P4 1.8GHz system.

Adam Morrison-Wood

A You've got IDE (ATA) right now. SCSI was developed at Apple and improving standards currently support 160MB/sec. SATA is the hot-swappable, 150MB/sec replacement for ATA, the downside being the controller you need to run it. SATA drives are mechanically identical to any other, and their moving parts blunt performance (find me a SATA drive that can sustain 150MB/sec and I'll eat a tree). As a gamer, you should go for the cheapest and largest IDE drive you can afford, ensuring it comes with a minimum two-year warranty.

Q When I play any music files, they stutter. I have a KT400 chipset with a Sound Blaster Live! 5.1 digital soundcard, Radeon 9600 and XP Pro. I've tried updating sound drivers, reinstalling XP, updating codecs... Do you have any other ideas?

Steve Knipe

A It's a widely documented problem, and one whose solution is as evasive as Creative and VIA. I'd first ensure that DMA is enabled in the Properties sheet of your two IDE channels in the Device Manager. Failing that, try putting the Blaster in a different PCI slot, and then juggling with IRQs in the PCI section of your BIOS. I've had a lot of bad luck with cheap Sound Blasters in the past, and I wouldn't touch one with yours.

Q I have a GeForce Ti200, but after experiencing low frame rates on several new games, I'm looking to buy a new one. I have about £150 to spend, but I don't want to buy a card which will only slightly increase visuals – it needs to be worth it.

James

A You want a new FX 5700 Ultra or Radeon 9600XT, but a used 9700 Pro would impress you a lot more.

Q I recently bought Norton Internet Security Professional 2004, but I get an error saying: 'Runtime Error ccevtmgr.exe R6025 – Pure Virtual Function Call'. How can I correct this problem?

Chris Jones

A Check the Support area on the Symantec website for your answer. Then find and rename RpaWinet.dll to RpaWinet.old, and/or uninstall the product and reinstall from scratch.

HERCULEAN FEAT

Q I just had to write in to thank you for the Hercules 9800SE All-In-Wonder pointer.

After previously complaining about how the Xbox shouldn't be written off, all is now redeemed – for £50 more than a 9600 Pro I have an effective 9800 Pro happily chewing away at anything I throw at it. The difference in *Max Payne 2* is truly amazing, and I got a TV thrown into the bargain too (even if it was a lot of hassle setting the thing up because of conflicts with DirectX 9b). Thanks again – I can't recommend the card

highly enough. Even if some people do have problems softmodding it, it's still a decent card regardless.

Guy Cocker

A Glad the mod worked for you. Hercules is also pleased – it's outselling all its competitors – but I've been warned that stocks are now extremely low and it's not producing any more. So if you're thinking of buying a 9800SE for softmodding into a 9800 Pro, do it now. [W]

Visit Wendy on the web at www.dearwendy.com



WATCHDOG

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■ **RIGHTING THE WRONGS** Adam Phillips

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Don't shred it Dabs, read it.

BREAKIN' THE LAW!

It was a monster: 23-inches in all. One of Sony's huge LCD monitors that is, worth a rather cool 1,800 UK pounds. Richard Morris reckoned it was exactly what he wanted when he bought one from Dabs in mid-November.

"However, the unit wasn't satisfactory and was completely unsuitable for me, as it had a large fan which made a lot of noise," explains Richard. "Due to the work I do and the hours I keep, this wasn't acceptable."

So quite rightly, under the distance selling regulations, Richard was well within his consumer rights to return the product within seven days – providing it was returned with all the packaging and the unit was exactly as he'd received it.

"I only switched the monitor on for about ten minutes, then packaged it back exactly as it had come," points out Richard. "I even used my own power leads and downloaded drivers from the Internet instead of using the supplied CD. This meant none of the cables, manual or software were used."

Above and beyond the call of consumer duty, Watchdog reckons. But Dabs disagrees – Richard has tried to obtain an RMA number from the company on more than one occasion, but it's having none of it.

"Dabs told me that the goods are second-hand because I opened them and that it can't take the unit back," fumes Richard. "The office of fair trading has since informed me that it's irrelevant whether the goods have been opened – a customer has to see the product in order to determine whether or not it's suitable. As it stands now, Dabs is refusing to reply to any further emails and I'm at a complete loss as to how to proceed from here."

Richard is "shocked and disgusted" by the way he's been treated by Dabs – and we're not hugely impressed either. In its defence, Dabs tells us that the cock-up was down to a simple mistake:

"The original return request received from Mr Morris suggested that the unit was faulty. So, in line with normal procedure, we asked the manufacturer to provide a diagnosis," explains a spokesperson for Dabs. "Sony confirmed that the noise from the fan was within normal tolerance levels."

Dabs accepts that, under the distance selling regulations, customers can indeed return items deemed unsuitable within seven days: "Due to the original request though, Mr Morris's return request was initially and mistakenly refused, and we apologise for any inconvenience caused," says Dabs. "An RMA number has since been issued and the LCD monitor has been returned to Dabs for a full refund."

REVOLTING REVOLUTION

Blimey – someone actually bought the massively ambitious *Republic: The Revolution*. Well, Tom Bezance tried to, anyway. He placed an order for the game with GamesPlanet at the beginning of October, for the princely sum of £17.99.

"The day after, I checked to see if the game had been shipped and it had," says Tom. "After two weeks though, the game still hadn't arrived – even though it said five working days for delivery."

Naturally, Tom sent GamesPlanet an email to enquire where the hell the game was, but received no reply. So he tried ringing the company, but only managed to get through to that bastion of consumer care – the humble answerphone.

And in response, GamesPlanet returned Tom's message. "It said it hadn't got any copies of *Republic* in stock, even though its website stated that the game had been sent and the money had been removed from my account," explains Tom. "The company then told me when its next shipment was due and promised to send me the game when it arrived."



More consumers trying to get hold of Republic: The Revolution.

Alas, a few weeks later and there was still no game. So Tom sent GamesPlanet another two emails, which finally gleaned a response saying that it would send out a lost-in-the-post form. He duly filled in the form, but has yet to receive a refund...

GamesPlanet told us: "We can confirm that we never sold that title at £17.99 – we have just checked out his order number and the order was placed at £22.99." Hmm. OK...

The company goes on to say that the order was not dispatched due to a "technical fault", but if Tom wants to get in touch, GamesPlanet says it will arrange a full refund immediately. And about time too. We also think that GamesPlanet should offer Tom some form of compensation for all the hassle.

BUTTERFINGERS

Women, eh? Watchdog really does despair: "My girlfriend foolishly bought a PC from PC World before I started seeing her, back in March 2002," says bloke Stuart Eccles. "She was conned big time – she paid £270 for an extended guarantee on a funky

monitor: a 17-inch monitor in black and grey.

"Anyway, we moved house in August and being a clumsy oaf, I managed to drop it," says Stuart. Men, eh? Watchdog really does despair.

When powered up, the monitor was now displaying its colours in negative. Fret not though, because under the extended guarantee, PC World has replaced it. Good news then, surely? "Except it was replaced with a bog-standard, second-hand 17-inch Compaq cream monitor," fumes Stuart.

Not at all happy, he ended up firing off three letters of complaint to Coverplan – all of which he reckons received piss-poor responses: "Basically, it says that it's the same spec as my previous monitor, and I've been told that my issues with the replacement are aesthetic and not included under Coverplan," says Stuart.

Two months later and he's still getting nowhere. "Coverplan has ignored all the points I've raised," sighs Stuart. "My problem is that we've been provided with a sub-standard, second-hand monitor. What's more, it's worth substantially less

THE ACCUSED

electrosave

dabs
com



GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

"Our monitor was replaced with a second-hand monitor, worth substantially less than the original purchase"

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

▲ IT MAY BE FROSTY OUTSIDE, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN EVERY COMPANY OUT THERE IS THE SAME. TAKE THESE TWO HEART-WARMING STORIES...

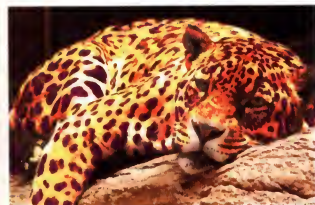
First up, reader Mark Brooks is delighted with Asetek's support after he bought one of its water chill kits which went kaput after a month: "I contacted Asetek support, who replied within an hour," he recalls. "The company asked me to check the wiring and when that was confirmed to be OK, it sent me a replacement control unit."

The replacement arrived three days later and Mark didn't have to send the old one back until the new one arrived. "Blisteringly good customer service," he reckons.

The next outpouring of praise is about an unlikely candidate – well, it is considering the amount of complaints we've printed about PC World over the years – oh, and this month as well (see 'Butter Fingers', below). Reader Guy Hanson, however, can only praise the company: "I wish to praise them for making the customer king!" he cries. Steady on.

While Watchdog slumps to the floor in surprise, Guy explains this piece of dramatic news: "On December 13th, my laptop's hard drive decided to end it all, leaving me somewhat in the lurch. A quick phone call to PC World confirmed my fears – the hard drive was indeed shot and the laptop would need to be collected and taken to its Mansfield workshop for repair."

Guy was warned that it would take between five and ten working days to sort out – and with Christmas fast looming, he resigned himself to not seeing the repaired PC until early 2004.



▼ Reader Guy Hanson proves that a leopard can change its spots...

"The laptop was dutifully collected on December 15th," recalls Guy. "Imagine my surprise then, on December 22nd, when a knock at the door turned out to be the courier returning my fully repaired laptop. Studying the docket with it, the engineer had worked on it on the Friday and sent it straight back out again. Now that's what I call impressive. Just three days excluding the weekend, from collection through to completion."

So Guy would like to send out a big thank you to PC World, who's restored his "faith in humanity". Credit where credit is due. Isn't it nice to have a happy ending?

than the original purchase, it's older than the original and PC World passes you from pillar to post, keeping you uninformed."

We asked PC World for its spin on the situation: "Our policy is to replace faulty monitors with a model of either equivalent or higher specification, which – as stated in the service agreement document – may be refurbished," states the company. "The vast majority of customers get something identical or near-identical to their original equipment."

However, PC World also states that if a customer is unhappy, its staff are briefed to offer a no-quibble swap: "We're sorry Mr Eccles was not automatically offered this, and will supply a replacement of equivalent appearance with our apologies." Hope that

sorts it, Stuart. Just let your girlfriend carry it next time...

BACK AND FORTH...

We know of a few cases where companies have bent over backwards to accommodate their customers, but very few where the reverse has happened. Step forward Mike Parry, who bought the parts to build a new PC from Scan. After slapping the new CPU, RAM, motherboard and hard drive into the new case, he hit the power button but the thing was dead.

"Scan told me to return all the items apart from the case, so I packed them up, but due to the bulk and value of the package and the insurance, I had to pay £18 to send it," recalls Mike.

According to Scan, all devices checked out OK except for the hard drive. "This puzzled me because, if anything, it was

more likely to be the motherboard or PSU that caused the problems," reckons Mike.

He then tested the PSU himself and found it was dead. "Now, I could have posted this, again costing Scan money," says Mike. "But I didn't – at my own expense I drove to Scan's office in Bolton – a four-hour round trip – and got the PSU replaced. At the same time, I picked up my other parts with a new hard drive." But, alas, the system still didn't work. Cue another four-hour car journey and the memory was found to be at fault.

"So, why am I peeved?" asks Mike. "Is it because I had to do two four-hour round trips at my own expense and I want Scan to pay? Is it because the second trip was to replace something it was supposed to have tested in the first place? No, it's because Scan won't refund the £18 it cost me to send back the faulty goods initially. It's the principle that counts here."

We got in touch with Scan, who told us that the £18 had been refunded more than a week before Watchdog got in touch. But to be honest, after all the hassle Mike has had, we think Scan really could have thrown, well, posted him some kind of goodwill gesture. Never mind, eh? [E]



Mike's trips to Scan were starting to take their toll on his car...

ON THE
CD/DVD

NEW!
Now supports
Video Drivers



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jolt
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BUYER'S GUIDE

Fancy a new motherboard, monitor or mouse? Even if it doesn't begin with 'M', you can find it here...

Gone are the three categories of old, and in their place are three new ones. Editor's Choice is the class champ, the product that will satisfy all of you, no matter what

you play. Our Recommended product wears a silver medal, not quite as triumphant as the outright winner, but a very worthy alternative. Finally, the Also

Consider product is one we believe you should look at before settling for one of the other two – it may just tickle your dipple. If you feel we've got something wrong, or

just want to add your tuppence ha'penny, mail letters@pczone.co.uk. If we act on your suggestion, we'll be certain to shower you with gifts. Promise.

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER

MOTHERBOARD



IS7-E (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £68.50

MANUFACTURER ABIT Computer

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.abit.com.tw

Huge performance coupled with a huge sigh of relief from your wallet. Although the IS7 uses Intel's Springdale chipset, essentially a restricted version of its Canterwood sibling, Abit's motherboard supports P4 800/533/400MHz CPUs with Hyper-Threading, and up to 4GB of Dual DDR. It also features onboard LAN, six-channel audio, and IEEE 1394 FireWire. Proof you don't need to spend over a ton for a top-rank motherboard.

WAS £72
NOW £68



K7N2 DELTA ILSR (ATHLON)

STREET PRICE £77.50

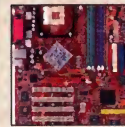
MANUFACTURER MSI

TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

With the nForce2 chipset and the FSB wound up to 400MHz, the K7N2 Delta provides AMD die-hards with extra shove from a faster system bus and up to 3GB of Dual DDR memory. Although Barton-cored Athlons aren't a patch on their Hyper-Threaded opposite numbers, boards like the K7N2 Delta close the gap. Other features include dual IEEE 1394 FireWire and automated BIOS updates.

WAS £82
NOW £77



875PNEO-FIS2R (INTEL)

STREET PRICE £119

MANUFACTURER MSI

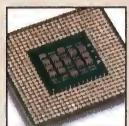
TELEPHONE 020 8813 6688

WEBSITE www.msi.com.tw

A high-end P4 Canterwood board, the Neo has some remarkable features, including dynamic overclocking – the hardware jumps on the throttle the moment you open apps – and automated BIOS updates using MSI's own Live Update software. Other features include IEEE 1394 FireWire, six-channel audio, onboard LAN and support for Dual DDR. Build quality and packaging are excellent.

WAS £119
NOW £119

PROCESSOR



P4 3.0GHZ

STREET PRICE £210

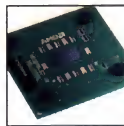
MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403000

WEBSITE www.intel.com

For an additional £160, you could order the three-litre chip's big brother, the 3.2GHz, but we don't think the extra thrust justifies the price hike. With Hyper-Threading enabled, the 3.0GHz Pentium delivers a jaw-pounding power hit from twin processors and an 800MHz front-side bus. With a decent motherboard and some fast memory, products such as this make *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* seem all the more plausible.

WAS £220
NOW £210



ATHLON XP 3000+ BARTON

STREET PRICE £174

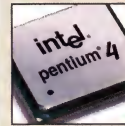
MANUFACTURER AMD

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.amd.com

Let's not forget who drove Intel into rolling out key features such as Hyper-Threading. AMD's Athlon successfully shocked its rival into releasing technologies that were originally pencilled for the next Pentium. And although any 3.0GHz HT on paper makes the Barton look like a distant runner-up, it remains a great chip at a great price. Paired with a decent video card, it's a high-quality solution.

WAS £174
NOW £174



P4 2.4GHZ

STREET PRICE £125

MANUFACTURER Intel

TELEPHONE 01793 403 000

WEBSITE www.intel.com

For little more than £200 you can have our Editor's Choice motherboard and a Hyper-Threading Pentium 4 chip running at 2.4GHz with 800MHz FSB. Drop in our favourite Radeon 9800 Pro video card, and instantly you have a balls-on machine that's ready and willing to tackle the next generation of gaming. If you're building a local games network and want big machines for small money, look no further.

WAS £125
NOW £125

HDD



WD1200JB 120GB

STREET PRICE £67.50

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

Many of you will view a 120GB HDD as an extravagance, but with games getting longer and broadband getting wider, a hangar-like hard drive gives you plenty of room for mucking about. You'll also bring that never-ending quest for more room to an abrupt end. The price is just right, and the performance second to none. Like the DiamondMax Plus9, the WD1200JB features an 8MB cache and a speed of 7200RPM.

WAS £67
NOW £67



DIAMOND MAX PLUS9 80GB

STREET PRICE £56.99

MANUFACTURER Maxtor

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.maxtor.com

The mid-sized Maxtor is for everyone: large, fast and not that pricey. Most users will find 80GB more than adequate for work, play and downloading requirements, and those greedy for more gig can jump a size up. The Fast ATA, 7200RPM drive includes Maxtor's Shock Protection System and Quiet Drive Technology, but for the Serial ATA version, expect to pay a £20 premium.

WAS £60
NOW £57



RAPTOR 36GB

STREET PRICE £96

MANUFACTURER Western Digital

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.westerndigital.com

If you don't need a deep hole for your data, or if you intend keeping your dirt on a separate drive, the 10,000RPM Serial ATA Raptor makes the ideal foundation for your primary partition. It's wickedly fast, perhaps the fastest HDD available yet, and although designed for server environments, provides gaming desktops with the kind of warp-nine, low access times that make any application more nimble.

WAS £100
NOW £96

GRAPHICS CARD



ULTRA/960 GOLDEN SAMPLE 128MB

STREET PRICE £145

MANUFACTURER Gainward

TELEPHONE 01635 524949

WEBSITE www.gainward.co.uk

Who'd have thought that we'd see an NVIDIA card winning the value battle after ATI's domination of the past two years? The Golden Sample is faster than the Radeon and level pegs the 9600XT in all the benchmarks. Crucially, in terms of bangs for your buck, the 5700 Ultra wins – it's ATI's turn to play catch-up.

WAS £137
NOW £145



128MB RADEON 9600 PRO

STREET PRICE £111

MANUFACTURER Gigabyte

TELEPHONE 01908 362700

WEBSITE uk.giga-byte.com

The 9600 Pro ties for value with the 5700 Ultra. For less than half the cost of a big-ass Raddy, the 128MB card packs an amazing punch that knocks most rivals for six. Gigabyte's bundle includes three top games, plus PowerDVD 5 and all the necessary cable whips. Only the arrival of Gainward's faster Ultra/960 Golden Sample prevents the Gigabyte card from holding on to top slot.

WAS £122
NOW £111



256MB V9950 ULTRA

STREET PRICE £374

MANUFACTURER ASUSTeK

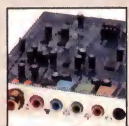
TELEPHONE 00 886 2 2890 7121

WEBSITE www.asus.com

The FX 5900 Ultra finds its feet again with the release of the series 50 Detonator drivers – top class Radeons will find themselves level-pegging with the big GeForce. The one thing preventing this and other über-cards from taking top slot is their alarming value – you don't get many frames per pound spent. But if you're after the hardware for top resolution, top quality gaming, this is it.

WAS £380
NOW £374

SOUNDCARD



REVOLUTION 7.1

STREET PRICE £90

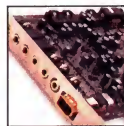
MANUFACTURER M-Audio

TELEPHONE 0871 717 7100

WEBSITE www.maudio.co.uk

Although it lacks a few of its rivals' gamer-friendly features, including hardware DirectSound and a joystick/MIDI port, the Revolution more than makes up for any deficit with a truly astonishing quality of sound. Unique technologies enhance your enjoyment of games, music and movies. The software is straight-talking and boasts a familiar look and feel, making the card a delight to work with.

WAS £88
NOW £90



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX

STREET PRICE £85

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

A quantum leap from its predecessor, the Audigy 2 offers a boggling range of pro-gamer and DVD features, including 6.1 surround sound, EAX Advanced HD, Advanced Resolution DVD-Audio and 24-bit/96kHz recording – it was the first card to gain THX certification from LucasFilm. If you appreciate the immersive experience offered by high-fidelity surround sound, the Audigy will give you an experience like no other.

WAS £85
NOW £85



AUDIGY 2 PLATINUM EX

STREET PRICE £167

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

With the same core features as its little brother, the Platinum Ex is guaranteed to perform and sound like no other. The external breakout box is a boon for serious listeners, including standard audio connections and volume controls. The big Platinum also offers dual SB1394 Firewire ports and optical links, a stereo RCA input, plus MIDI In and MIDI Out mini-DIN sockets.

WAS £150
NOW £167



World's Most Powerful VGA ever...

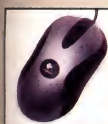


Worldwide No.1 VGA Card Manufacturer

EDITOR'S CHOICE

RECOMMENDED

ALSO CONSIDER



MX500

STREET PRICE £34

MANUFACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127

WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Although it comes with a tail and doesn't have the same substantive feeling as the battery-reliant MX700, the MX500 remains a solid product and a solid performer in all games. It features Logitech's MX optical engine, mouse wheel (plus two additional buttons either side to aide document navigation), a task-switcher button, and two thumb buttons that speed up web navigation.



OPTICAL MOUSE BLUE

STREET PRICE £20

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

If you've ever been boggled by the number of buttons on a mouse, and have fond memories of a time when three clickers and a wheel were all you needed, Microsoft's blue rodent is the perfect peripheral. It's nice to look at, nice to hold and, as any veteran FPS gamer will tell you, three buttons is all you need. Plus the latest optical technology means it works anywhere.



MX700

STREET PRICE £47

MANUFACTURER ACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127

WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Sporting the MX optical engine that made Logitech famous with gamers, the MX700 is essentially an MX500 with its tail lopped off. A cradle keeps your desk tidy and acts as a recharger for the unfettered rodent – making the mouse more attractive to people who don't do batteries. It's a touch pricey and we remain unconvinced that going cordless is worth the extra stash.

MICE



INTERNET NAVIGATOR

STREET PRICE £21

MANUFACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127

WEBSITE www.logitech.com

The Internet Navigator lies absolutely flat on your desk, a trademark Logitech design that makes it look sleeker and 'feel' nicer. There's a scroll wheel along the left edge and a raft of customisable function keys to make trawling the web a cinch – you no longer have to swap back and forth to the mouse, and instead can leave your hands over on the keyboard. Once you browse this way, there's no going back.



INTERNET KEYBOARD

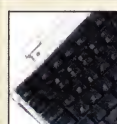
STREET PRICE £15

MANUFACTURER Microsoft

TELEPHONE 0870 601 0100

WEBSITE www.microsoft.com/uk

Forget what you've learned about Microsoft software – its hardware is always of a high build quality and, despite problems with early Intellimouse rodents, very durable. Shortcut buttons you think you'll never use soon become second nature, especially when reconfigured to suit your way of working. And once you learn the enhanced layout, you'll never go back to anything else.



PRO KEYBOARD

STREET PRICE £50

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 0800 039 1010

WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

If you think we're mad for including an Apple keyboard, think again. Anyone looking for a Rolls-Royce keyboard, and who can live without all the additional buttons, scroll wheels and assorted paraphernalia, need look no further. The Apple Pro plugs straight into your USB port and, with the help of third-party utilities, disguises the fact that it was designed for computer illiterates with fewer than two mouse buttons.

KEYBOARD



CYBORG EVO

STREET PRICE £26

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451900

WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A welcome new look for Saitek, and the welcome addition of a four-way adjustable head, larger buttons, plus a meaty damped throttle at the back of the base. As with all Cyborgs, the sculpted hand-rests can be repositioned ambidextrously and will suit all hand sizes. An eight-way hat switch, five thumb buttons with trigger, four base buttons and a shift key to double the possible combinations make this a winner.



CYBORG 3D GOLD

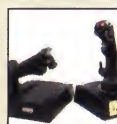
STREET PRICE £23

MANUFACTURER Saitek

TELEPHONE 01454 451 900

WEBSITE www.saitek.com

A former Best Buy, the Saitek stick is renowned for the way it can be taken apart and put back together to fit your hand perfectly, and also for its ambidextrous nature – lefties as well as righties can get to grips with it. It features seven fire buttons and, like the Sidewinder, has eight hat buttons, a lever throttle and a twist grip for controlling the rudder. At this price you'd be daft not to.



HOTAS COUGAR

STREET PRICE £249

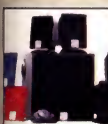
MANUFACTURER Thrustmaster

TELEPHONE 020 8665 1881

WEBSITE www.thrustmaster.co.uk

The John Holmes of joysticks. Based on the flight controls of an F-16, sturdy metal construction makes it feel like no other peripheral. With 28 customisable buttons, 18lbs of resistance built into its springs, programmable hat switches and an adaptive action for the separate throttle arm, it transforms any flight simulation and is the ultimate toy for wannabe pilots. It's ten times the cost of a regular joystick, but is in a class of its own.

JOYSTICK



INSPIRE 5.1 5300

STREET PRICE £50

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

The Inspire furnishes you with five satellite speakers, a sub and a wired remote control. All are sleek looking, solid feeling and great sounding. The bass is clean, the middle and treble crisp, and although power output doesn't climb into three digits, the amp provides more than enough oomph. Added to which, there's support for enhanced 5.1 surround sound on EAX titles. The only downside is that there's no headphone jack.



Z-640

STREET PRICE £70

MANUFACTURER Logitech

TELEPHONE 020 7309 0127

WEBSITE www.logitech.com

Logitech has patented the pressure-driver design of its subwoofer and we can hear the difference. For the money, the clout is simply amazing – bassheads among you will love it. Higher frequencies don't disappoint either, the 5.1 sounding almost as clean and inviting as the Inspire 5300s. Unlike the Creative set, the Z-640 has a headphone socket, but it's not conveniently sited. Shame.



MEGAWORKS THX 5.1 550

STREET PRICE £270

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Successor to our Best Performance winner, the Megaworks 550 is a stunning 5.1 setup with five 70W capsule-shielded satellite speakers, a 150W wood subwoofer and a wired remote with a separate headphone socket. Built to THX standards, the sound quality is superb in DVDs and games – Creative's BASH system providing 500W of power that'll make you leap out of your seat.

SPEAKERS



CML174SXW

STREET PRICE £330

MANUFACTURER Hitachi

TELEPHONE 01628 585000

WEBSITE www.hitachidigitalmedia.com

When it comes to flat panel, fast-paced gaming, response times really count. And the CML174SXW has one of the lowest response times in its sector – a mere 16ms. It also delivers top-notch image quality, weighs in at just 5kg, and comes in colours that'll match your kit. If you're looking to make the move from CRT, and action games are a priority for you, the handsome little Hitachi is the obvious choice.



FLATRON L1710B

STREET PRICE £345

MANUFACTURER LG Electronics

TELEPHONE 01753 491500

WEBSITE www.lge.co.uk

This 17-inch panel came within a gnat's guff of knocking our Hitachi favourite from the top spot, but its slightly fatter price tag (from the addition of a USB hub), plus inconspicuous silver and grey trim saw the L1710B lose out. But don't think it's a distant second place – things are as close as a kiss, the LG offering marginally better picture quality and matching the Hitachi for speed. Yet another nail in the CRT coffin.



VISIONMASTER PRO 514

STREET PRICE £490

MANUFACTURER Iiyama

TELEPHONE 01438 745 482

WEBSITE www.iiyama.co.uk

Boasting a 22in Mitsubishi Electric DIAMONDTRON tube, 0.24 mm AG pitch and flicker-free refresh rates at immense resolutions, the Iiyama is a truly breathtaking sight on your desktop – not least because it gobbles so much of it. The big VM also features a typically comprehensive on-screen menu, USB hub and audio connectors. At 1600x1200, the display is rock steady at 110Hz and is ideal partner for gaming.

SCREENS



APPLE IPOD 40GB

STREET PRICE £400

MANUFACTURER Apple

TELEPHONE 020 8210 1000

WEBSITE www.apple.com/uk

There are loads of MP3 players on the market but everybody wants an iPod – and the new version is even smaller (in size) yet bigger (in capacity). It weighs less than two CDs and can store up to 7,500 tracks, and as a bonus the supplied headphones are not patch too. The speedy Firewire interface (you'll need a suitable connection) and remote control rounds off a totally class act.



ARCHOS JUKEBOX MULTIMEDIA

STREET PRICE £316

MANUFACTURER Archos

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.archos.com

While it may never win any awards for aesthetics, the Jukebox Multimedia from Archos is the Swiss Army Knife of media players. Handling one of the widest selections of file types, the player can even play back a selection of video formats including DIVX. The sound is fantastic, but the bundled headphones are shite. And it's cheaper than the mighty iPod.



MUVO

STREET PRICE £50

MANUFACTURER Creative Labs

TELEPHONE N/A

WEBSITE www.europe.creative.com

The MuVo is one of the smartest gadgets we've seen. It comes in two parts, a USB key that plugs into any system running XP (without drivers), and a battery housing. Plug it into your PC and you can back up your documents. Drag a few MP3s onto the drive and when you snap the two halves together and plug in some headphones you've got one of the smallest MP3 players on the market.

MP3 PLAYER

FX5700



MSI
MICRO STAR INTERNATIONAL
www.msi.com.tw



MAILBOX

It's bloody freezin' outside, so why not stay in and write to us instead?

■ HERE TO LISTEN Dave Woods



SIZE IS EVERYTHING

Call me old-fashioned (or just mad, or nothing at all), but do we really need to improve on the visuals in *Unreal 2*, *Halo*, *Doom 3* or any of the new games? Shouldn't developers start concentrating on making huge games with massive maps and hundreds of bots and human players? Even if it means reverting back to the level of detail in *Quake 2*? I sure wouldn't mind.

BlondeFox

There are games like that being made and there are some on sale already, such as *PlanetSide* – and there's no need to drop down to yesteryear's *Quake 2* visuals.



You want epic, massive-scale combat? Try *PlanetSide* for size.

But large-scale titles like this are never going to negate the need for different games, such as *Doom 3*, where not knowing what's round the corner is the reason for playing the game.

SNOOKERED

I've just read the letter from Ryan Seabury entitled 'Black Widow' in the January issue of *PC ZONE*, and would like to say that this game does exist on the PC. Well actually, it's an improved version and it's called *Jimmy White's Cueball World*. Made by Archer MacLean and released by Virgin Interactive, it's now

available on the Sold Out budget label for £5. It includes snooker, pool and a few pub games like darts and *Dropzone*. It was released a couple of years ago and should work fine with modern PCs.

Adam

ANGER MANAGEMENT

Well done. Top marks for being sneaky underhand bastards and saying you'd got footage of *Doom 3* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* on your DVD when in fact you hadn't. Selling something on the pretence that it's something it's not does not bode well under the Trades Description Act. I was really looking forward to them, and that's why I went out in the pissing-down rain to get it – to find what? A pile of crap. May

you all be impaled on hot pokers for this underhand deception.

Dan Xavier

Both *Deus Ex: Invisible War* and *Doom 3* were on January's DVD, powered by a new-fangled technology called DVD-video. To be fair, we've had a few emails along the same lines (although none quite as aggressive), so I'll put the issue to bed – to watch the DVD footage just stick the DVD in your DVD player or use DVD software on your PC. If you haven't got either you won't be able to watch.

TIME OR TALENT?

I remember the days of *Doom* fondly, and spent hour upon hour sat in front of it. Today, I completed *Call Of Duty* in half a day, last week I completed *Tron 2.0* in a day, and *Jedi Academy* in a similar length of time. Are games getting shorter, or are we getting better?

Joseph Thomson

There's a scientific answer to that question: games are getting shorter (generally) and we're (with the exception of our art editor, Phil) getting better (marginally).

SICK AND WRONG

Just wanted to get something off my chest. It's getting really annoying how there's this myth that hackers are some kind of freedom fighters sticking it to the big corporations. Every time there's a big virus on the loose,

the big companies targeted get their boffins to sort out their security before the virus hits so they're covered.

Unfortunately, this means that the only people affected are your average household PC users, who then discover everything's gone pear-shaped and they need to wipe their hard drive and re-install (if they know how). And don't get me started on the whole "booked time off work over Christmas in great anticipation of playing *Half-Life 2* to death, oops they've stolen the source code, can't play it until April – bastards" issue.

Mark Reid

I couldn't agree more. I stupidly let my anti-virus software lapse and just discovered a record number of over 200 infected files, including my *Hidden & Dangerous 2* save games. And if you had any idea of the painfully slow progress I was making through this game, you'd know I'm in a whole world of hurt.

CONFESSION

Bless me *PC ZONE*, for I have sinned. It has been 12 months since my last *ZONE* purchase. Last week, I bought issue 137 to help get back up to speed on the best games during Christmas. For me (a rugby enthusiast and life-long player), the best moment of 2003 was, of course, the excitement and hype surrounding *Half-Life 2* (what else?).

But then I watched the videos on your cover DVD. And what's this? *Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault*? Real-world physics, stuff blowing up, nice splashy water effects and bodies like rag dolls? And what's this? *Stalker: Oblivion Lost*? That little city looks amazing! The sun rises and sets! And there are clouds and rain and thunder and lightning!

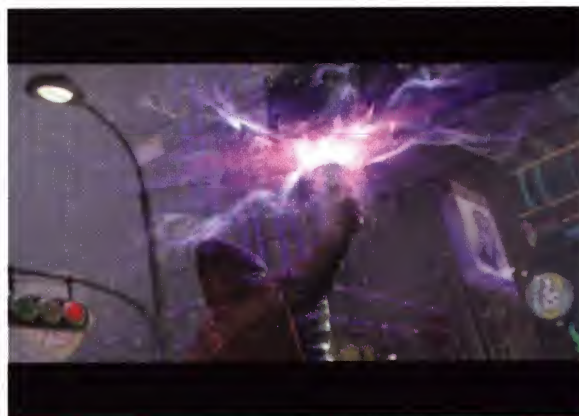
As for *Unreal Tournament 2004*, well, I might as well put a bucket under my desk and shove a feeding tube up my nose because I know I'm not

WRITE IN AND WIN A SOUND CARD. WE CAN'T SAY FAIRER THAN THAT, CAN WE?

MAILBOX, *PC ZONE*, 9 DALLINGTON ST, LONDON EC1V 0BQ, OR EMAIL LETTERS@PCZONE.CO.UK

WIN!
A TOP
SOUND
CARD

■ The Letter of the Month wins a spanking new soundcard, courtesy of the lovely people at Creative Labs. The Audigy 2 Platinum has been firmly ensconced in our Buyer's Guide since its release, and is one of the best cards you can currently buy.



You can watch any of our DVDs on a standard DVD player.

“It’s really annoying that there’s this myth that hackers are some kind of freedom fighters”

MARK REID. ON WHY HACKERS SHOULD BE SHOT

going anywhere for a *long* time when that game gets installed. Oh! And that lady vampire in *Vampire 2* – her tits wobble when she runs! That kind of detail deserves big, shiny, gold awards. I now realise the size of the rock I placed myself under for so long, and you *PC ZONE*, are the

light. You have shown me the path to gaming enlightenment. You are my shepherd through the valley of reality – I am your sheep. Baaaa.

Alex Gemmell

So we're not the only people wondering why the whole nation is so obsessed with a

man who can kick a ball
between two giant sticks.

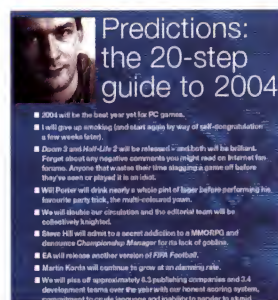
ANAL SPECS.

Dear oh dear! On page 127 of your latest mag you have a screenshot from *Secret Weapons Over Normandy* under which is written, 'The Spitfire: Britain's greatest achievement?' Now, call me fussy, or call me anally retentive, but surely every British male grows up to be able to tell the difference between a Spitfire and a Hurricane! Except the guys at *PC ZONE*!

The plane in question is a Hurricane and not a Spitfire! But hold on a second! It has just occurred to me that this apparently inaccurate labelling may not, in fact, be evidence of stunted development, but a deeply perceptive question which displays a sound knowledge of revisionist histories of the Second World War! Given that Hurricanes shot down the bulk of German planes in the Battle of Britain, perhaps you are indeed right to question the vaunted reputation with which the Spitfire emerged from the Battle, and are subtly paying tribute to its less glamorous but perhaps more deserving sister? So which is it to be? Are you stunted or do you have unnaturally large brains and misshapen heads?

Dr Julian Scott

Ah, a kindred spirit. We've been doing everything in our powers to raise the awareness of the Hurricane in the consciousness of the British



My 2004 predictions, some of which are coming true already. Nostradamus has nothing on us.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

M'LUDD

I'm a final year law student at the University of Sheffield and a keen reader of your magazine. Now, while I wouldn't consider myself to be a legal expert, nor a legal draftsman, I believe my knowledge to be sufficient to outline the following error in your article 'Backed Into A Corner' (January 2004). I've looked at section s296, which applies to 'Circumvention of technical devices applied to computer program'.' The new law makes it illegal for any person with commercial purposes to facilitate the unauthorised removal or circumvention of the technical device. It does not either expressly or impliedly make it an offence for a person such as a consumer to circumvent these technical devices. Therefore, your statement, 'to put it bluntly, what it means is that if a disc has some form of anti-copy protection, it's a criminal offence to either circumvent that protection yourself' is wholly incorrect. The new s296 still allows you to make a backup if you have a right to use the software. You also mention s296Z, but this expressly omits computer programs from its remit. Given this, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the matter in hand, and any actions which you intend to take with regards to the article.

Andrew Lee

The original letter, like any legal document, made very little sense – but we got the finest code-crackers onto it and ended up with an abridged version that was sent to the author of the article and legal whiz kid Stuart Campbell. This is his response: “As Sony vs. Owens demonstrates, copyright law (like most law) is widely open to interpretation, and most interpretations of the new law hold that making personal backups will be illegal. (The games industry’s stated position, for example, is that backups were illegal even before the new law.) Consumer organisations are already taking action on that basis, as noted in this story: www.theregister.co.uk/content/6/34695.html

"However, even if the new law was to be interpreted in such a way that you theoretically were still allowed to make a backup, how are you supposed to actually do it? Games are copy-protected, and hence can only be copied via the use of some program or tool to circumvent that protection. However, since those tools and programs are now all automatically in contravention of the law, it is de facto impossible to make the legal backup copy which the law explicitly entitles you to, which is the glaring contradiction at the heart of the feature.

"The reference to the clause about non-computer software is in regard to an argument which has been used recently by the industry, namely that the graphics, music and sound of a game are individual copyright works separate from the program code, therefore not 'computer software', and are hence exempt from the right to backup." (Crikey, *keep it light lads* - Ed.)

BACKCHAT

THE BEST OF THE CHAT FROM THE
PC ZONE FORUM THIS MONTH. GET
INVOLVED AT WWW.PCZONE.CO.UK

If you've read this month's feature (p30), you'll already have gorged yourself on the most controversial games in existence. Or maybe not. We threw down the gauntlet on our forum, begging the question 'what's the worst game ever?' and donned plastic raincoats to deflect the detritus. **Deadmartyr's** obviously got nothing better to do, because his first post pinged onto our screens mere seconds after we'd made the request. "How about the mind-bending, boredom-inducing *Microsoft Flight Simulator?*" The one *The Daily Mail* suggested the Taliban use some of its military budget on to train people to fly those planes into the Twin Towers." Please, don't get us started on *The Mail*, we'd be likely to end up in a '50 Most Controversial Outbursts In A National Magazine' feature.

Rolls_Roy achieved the unattainable by pointing us to *Commando Libya* for the Commodore 64, which probably would have made our feature, had we heard of it in time. "The gameplay was in two parts. One of them was mowing people down who were fleeing the country. The other was executing Libyans standing in front of a wall, by machine-gunning them. On top of all that, there were a lot of extremely racist comments made between levels. Sick, sick, sick!" Indeed, but what about *Vice City*? It made our list because of the infamous "Kill the Haitians" remark, but **IvoryOutlaw78** makes a much more valid complaint: "It makes the '80s seem cool again. A game where you cause havoc to the sound of Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie and Nena is simply wrong!"

Black & White caused controversy, not for its content, but the way it divided the gaming community. So says **Fyska**: "Some people hated it, some loved it. The people who hated it generally don't see past the bugs and faults. Yes, they shouldn't be there, but it's a f**king class game!" "The wrongest game ever?" asked **Gowerly**. "Well, *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit* was the target of a lawsuit/parental attack (not sure which is worse), as some guy was found going too fast in his car, caused an accident and blamed it on the game. It's sad, really. However, *Big Brother* is the wrongest game ever. It's a scandal it was ever released." Something that nobody can disagree with.



Commando Libya: it's just harmless entertainment...


public – petitions, door-to-door campaigning and carefully crafted captions. Thank you sir, not least for making prediction no.15 from my editorial last issue come true already, just two weeks into the first month of the year.

FULL TIME

I've finally bought *PES3* and it's the best there is. No goalfests, just complete control once you get used to using the gamepad. It's the definitive football game then? Er... No. Because get this

– as well as being the only football game worth playing in real-time, it's also just about the only game where you can't! The maximum you can set a game to run to is 30 minutes. **PC ZONE!** Write to Konami! You've got to do something! Please!

*Amb*s

We love *PES3* almost as much as life itself but have never felt the need to play full 45-minute halves. Still, we happen to know Konami hangs on every word printed in *PC ZONE* so fingers crossed... 

THE PCZONE A-LIST

◀ SHOOTERS ▶

CALL OF DUTY



Quite simply the greatest shooter currently on the market, *Call Of Duty* is like the tour-de-force Omaha beach level of *Allied Assault*, stretched out over an entire game. Never before has war felt so real, the player felt so helpless and comrades felt so human. Constantly managing to mix up feelings of dread, fear, excitement and exhilaration within you, there is no greater WWII experience than this.

PUB Activision DEV Infinity Ward
PCZ ISSUE: 136



MAX PAYNE 2

It's Payne! Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense and well-designed that you just won't care.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Remedy

PCZ ISSUE: 136

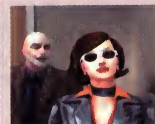


MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT

It may have been toppled by *Call Of Duty*, but *Allied Assault*'s set-pieces, period detail and intense action can still beat most recent FPS releases hands-down. Its graphics may be ageing slightly these days, but it's still a hell of a ride.

PUB EA DEV 2015

PCZ ISSUE 112



NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

Style, stealth and magnificent set-pieces are the order of the day in this excellent spy sequel. It looks brilliant, it's well designed and genuinely funny – and it doesn't treat you like an idiot.

PUB Black Label Games DEV Monolith

PCZ ISSUE 122

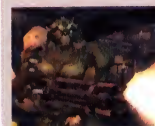


HALF-LIFE: GENERATIONS

Unchallenged for three years, *Half-Life* redefined its genre with a cracking atmosphere and a compelling plot. It now comes bundled with the excellent *Opposing Force* add-on pack and the world's favourite mod, *Counter-Strike*.

PUB Vivendi DEV Valve Software

PCZ ISSUE 71



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

NEW ENTRY A fleshed out, revamped *UT* offering that far exceeds both its predecessors and our expectations. Extra game modes, superb vehicles, plus inspired weapons and features, it's one of the best multiplayer blasts around.

PUB Atari DEV Digital Extremes

PCZ ISSUE 138



UNREAL II

In terms of visuals, this is the absolute pinnacle in the world of the FPS. What's more, the arsenal of weaponry at your disposal is imaginative and satisfying to wield, while the sound effects, music and voice acting all exude quality too.

PUB Atari DEV Legend Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 126



MAFIA

From the makers of *Hidden & Dangerous* and just as compelling, this game borrows from every great gangster film ever made. Tense missions, superb atmosphere and great AI – it's a classic in every respect. Badabing!

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion

PCZ ISSUE 119



JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

The latest saber-em-up from the Lucas stable is an absolute winner; think fights with Boba Fett, double-ended light sabers, customisable characters and even the opportunity to turn to the Dark Side. Ace.

PUB Activision DEV Raven

PCZ ISSUE 133



HALO

After two years, the Xbox masterpiece has come home to the PC. It may be visually long in the tooth, but its exceptional multiplayer mayhem, superb vehicles and solid solo missions puts it squarely in our hall of fame.

PUB Microsoft DEV Bungie/Gearbox

PCZ ISSUE 135

◀ STRATEGY ▶

MEDIEVAL: TOTAL WAR



A sequel to the stunning *Shogun: Total War* (now available on budget), *Medieval* offers everything its predecessor did and a whole lot more.

Adding to the massive 3D battles and turn-based *Risk*-style strategy map are a multitude of new options, both diplomatic and military. Breathtaking in every way, strategy games just don't come any better than this.

PUB Activision

DEV Creative Assembly

PCZ ISSUE 120



RISE OF NATIONS

One of the most addictive and satisfying strategy games to land on our desks in ages. Its unique perspective, great gameplay and all-round freshness make *Rise Of Nations* a title worthy of our prestigious Classic award.

PUB Microsoft DEV Big Huge Games

PCZ ISSUE 129



AGE OF MYTHOLOGY

The *Age Of* series goes 3D in Ensemble Studios' best strategy outing to date. Great gameplay, superb attention to detail and a strong storyline give this an unparalleled sense of atmosphere, plus it includes a decent map editor.

PUB Microsoft DEV Ensemble Studios

PCZ ISSUE 123



REPUBLIC: THE REVOLUTION

This highly original take on the machinations of political upheaval in Eastern Europe has split gaming opinion down the middle, but we think it's a fascinating, educating and unique piece of gaming history.

PUB Eidos Interactive DEV Elixir Studios

PCZ ISSUE 132

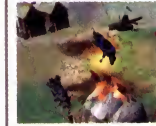


WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Warrior Kings was one of the most compelling and diverse RTS games we'd seen. This second chapter, which focuses around skirmish play, offers more units, varied tech trees and challenging AI generals.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Black Cactus

PCZ ISSUE 128



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

The latest to fall off the *Age Of Empires* lorry may not innovate, but there's a good variety of nations with accurate historical spins (General Patton, Richard the Lionheart etc), as well as novel unit types and well-written campaigns.

PUB Activision DEV Stainless Steel Studios

PCZ ISSUE 135



COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS

The C&C series comes of age in this 3D orgy of scud missiles, daisy-cutter bombs and nuclear strikes. *Generals* is a superb-looking game with well-designed sides that offers fun in spades.

PUB EA DEV EA Pacific/Westwood

PCZ ISSUE 127

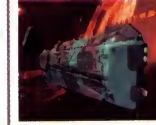


COMMANDOS 2

There have been a few imitators of the squad-based strategy of *Commandos* but none have come close to this sequel. If, like us, you loved the first game, you'll love this massive, preposterously detailed follow-up even more.

PUB Eidos DEV Pyro Studio

PCZ ISSUE 108



HOMEWORLD 2

The interface to this epic space combat RTS might be a bit intimidating for rookies, but *Homeworld 2* definitely deserves a place in our hall of fame. Staggering visuals and gripping strategic manoeuvring make it addictive.

PUB VU Games DEV Relic

PCZ ISSUE 134



WARCRAFT III

While not a huge departure from the original, *Warcraft III* is an extremely enjoyable and polished package. The storyline is brilliant and the multiplayer action dangerously addictive. Simple, solid entertainment.

PUB VU Games DEV Blizzard

PCZ ISSUE 119

Welcome to the **PC ZONE A-List**, the definitive buyer's guide for all discerning PC gamers. The games that grace these pages aren't just good, they're the best of the best in their respective genres, and our list is continually updated to show how each game stands in relation to its peers

ROLE-PLAYING GAMES ▶

KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



The best RPG to appear for five whole years, and the best *Star Wars* game to surface in ten. *Knights of the Old Republic* manages to develop the franchise more than even Lucas's cinematic efforts ever could. With beautiful graphics, a gripping plot, oodles of Force powers and supreme character development, this is proof, if ever it were needed, that Bioware is one of the best developing houses on the planet.

PUB: Activision **DEV:** Bioware
PCZ ISSUE 137

DEUS EX

Great sci-fi plot, amazing attention to detail and unparalleled player freedom: combining the finer elements of *Half-Life*, *System Shock 2* and *Thief*, *Deus Ex* is an RPG of complex beauty and a true revolution in computer gaming.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 93**

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND

One of the most impressive RPGs we've seen in years. A massively open-ended world full of beautiful visuals, superb depth of gameplay and innovative character development make this a classic that will keep you totally absorbed.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Bethesda Softworks **PCZ ISSUE 117**

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

The makers of the epic *Baldur's Gate* series prove they're still a leading force in the world of RPGs with this glorious hardcore 3D adventure. It features great single and multiplayer options, along with a very accessible toolkit.

PUB Atari **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 118**

PLANESCAPE: TORMENT

An incredible game from Black Isle, using the *Baldur's Gate* engine. With a compelling story, well-scripted dialogue and the best character development we've seen in any game of its kind, this is a dark, adult scorch of an RPG.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Black Isle Studio **PCZ ISSUE 87**

DUNGEON SIEGE

Graphically brilliant, massively enjoyable and highly immersive, *Dungeon Siege* is one of the best RPGs to date and only misses out on a Classic because of the shortcomings in the narrative.

PUB Microsoft **DEV** Gas Powered Games **PCZ ISSUE 115**

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Definitely one of the most original and disturbing games to hit the PC, *System Shock 2* manages to successfully mix the genres of role-playing, action and adventure into one. Play it with the lights off if you're hard enough.

PUB EA **DEV** Irrational Games **PCZ ISSUE 80**

BALDUR'S GATE II

The original *Baldur's Gate* was hailed as one of the best story-driven role-playing games ever. The sequel isn't vastly different, but it's bigger, better and still extremely addictive. An essential for anyone interested in PC role-playing.

PUB Interplay **DEV** Bioware **PCZ ISSUE 96**

DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

It's had most of its role-playing elements sucked out and developed a strong console bias, but the gripping plot and action remain intact. It wasn't the revolution we wanted, but it's still a worthwhile purchase.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Ion Storm **PCZ ISSUE 137**

DIVINE DIVINITY

This epic RPG contains the action of *Diablo II* combined with the storyline of the *Baldur's Gate* series, not to mention about 200 hours of gameplay in a huge fantasy world. The name may be a bit silly, but the gameplay certainly isn't.

PUB CDV **DEV** Larian Studios **PCZ ISSUE 121**

▶ ACTION/ADVENTURE

SPLINTER CELL



At long last we've got a new king of the action adventures with the Tom Clancy-influenced *Splinter Cell*, and a new crown prince of stealth in the form of the über-flexible Sam Fisher. *Splinter Cell* features the perfect blend of action, structure and pace, combined with some of the best visuals and set pieces around. No self-respecting gamer should miss out on this.

PUB Ubisoft
DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 125

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

NEW ENTRY A beautiful game with a myriad of styles that evokes the spirit of *Little Big Adventure*, along with a touch of *Zelda* sparkle. Whether you're fighting government conspiracies or photographing wildlife, it's never dull.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft **PCZ ISSUE 138**

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

The fluidity, ingenuity and graphical splendour of *The Sands Of Time* cannot be faulted. Combat may be unsatisfying, but the time-control gimmicks and fast-paced acrobatics put Lara to shame.

PUB Ubisoft **DEV** Ubisoft Montreal **PCZ ISSUE 136**

GRIM FANDANGO

If you've followed LucasArts from the early days of *Monkey Island*, *Sam & Max* and *Day Of The Tentacle*, this is a must. The scripting is impeccable, while sublime graphics and brilliant humour ensure it's top of its genre.

PUB Activision **DEV** LucasArts **PCZ ISSUE 71**

SILENT HILL 2: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Survival horror games have truly come of age with this superbly creepy and atmospheric offering. The (near identical) third game is also out, but for our money this is still the champ. Classy and disturbing.

PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 126**

METAL GEAR SOLID 2: SUBSTANCE

A convincing PC conversion that adds tanker-loads of side-missions, training stages and unlockable characters to the PS2 original. There's too much waffle, but it's still an excellent third-person sneakfest.

PUB Konami **DEV** Konami **PCZ ISSUE 127**

SOUL REAVER 2

While this latest episode in the saga of Raziel takes few risks with the action/adventure formula, it's a consummately constructed example of the genre. Compelling storyline, satisfying combat and excellent puzzle dynamics.

PUB Eidos **DEV** Crystal Dynamics **PCZ ISSUE 111**

DISCWORLD NOIR

Although the point-and-click adventure game is dying, *Discworld Noir* is still very much alive. It's darker in style than previous *Discworld* games and in our opinion, all the better for it.

PUB Atari **DEV** Perfect Entertainment **PCZ ISSUE 79**

THE THING

Drawing on some brilliant raw material from John Carpenter's classic horror movie, this survival action horror picks up the story where the film left off. It's one of the best film spin-offs around, with tense atmosphere and good gameplay.

PUB Black Label Games **DEV** Computer Artworks **PCZ ISSUE 121**

BROKEN SWORD: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

It has its detractors, but nobody can deny that the third *Broken Sword* game seamlessly reinvents the traditional point-and-click into the realm of 3D. The dialogue may grate, but it's still well worth a look.

PUB THQ **DEV** Revolution **PCZ ISSUE 136**

◀ GOD GAMES ▶

BLACK & WHITE



Although it had its critics, we still stand by our original verdict. Peter Molyneux's vision is pure and the design of the game breaks boundaries and serves as a blueprint for the future. The add-on *Creature Isle* is also available, which cuts down on micro-management and enables you to guide your creature through a variety of mini-games. Pure genius in a box.

PUB EA DEV Lionhead Studios
PCZ ISSUE 100



CIVILIZATION III

Civilization III sticks to the same compulsive gameplay that made the first two games so popular. Die-hard *Civ* fans will relish the improved visuals and animation, while the new user-friendly interface makes the game accessible to the first-timer. Brings to mind the maxim 'if it ain't broke...'

PUB Atari DEV Firaxis Games

PCZ ISSUE 111



GHOST MASTER

Take your team of ghosts into the town of Gravenille and solve some otherworldly problems, scare a few mortals and bag yourself some new team-mates in this innovative spook 'em up that's one of the freshest and funniest games we've seen for a long time.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Sick Puppies

PCZ ISSUE 130



THE SIMS

Revolutionary at birth, the concept has since been diluted through numerous add-ons and an unhealthy long stay in the charts. It's now little more than a cash cow for Electronic Arts, although you can't help but admire the strength of community and the fact that it's still selling by the bucket-load.

PUB EA DEV Maxis/EA

PCZ ISSUE 87

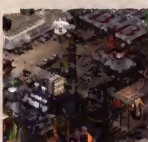


VEGAS: MAKE IT BIG

An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself, *Make It Big* provides hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that let you suck the money out of punters' pockets. It can get a little too fiddly, but it looks and plays really well. A PC ZONE 'Essential'.

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Deep Red

PCZ ISSUE 135



SPACE COLONY

Whether you're trying to attract space-tourists or battle neighbouring aliens, taking control of 20 rowdy space colonists and pandering to them makes for a charming and original management jaunt, with plenty of missions to keep you going.

PUB Gathering DEV Firefly Studios

PCZ ISSUE 136



CAESAR III

Starting from scratch, you've got to build a majestic Roman city and ensure a harmonious life for your citizens by balancing their work, health and entertainment needs. So what? So it's probably one of the most utterly absorbing and addictive god sims in existence. Hail Caesar.

PUB VU Games DEV Impressions

PCZ ISSUE 70

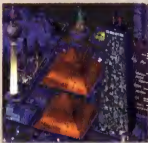


EMPEROR: RISE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

This intricate game comes from the same stable as *Zeus* and *Caesar* – and they know a thing or two about city building. There's a massive amount of gameplay and more than 50 missions spanning seven historic campaigns. As well as the economic considerations, you'll have to follow feng shui and the Chinese zodiac.

PUB VU Games DEV Breakaway Games

PCZ ISSUE 121



SIM CITY 4

The latest outing of the best-selling city-building sim goes 3D. Unfortunately, there are no huge leaps forwards in gameplay, but there are plenty of features, such as regional cities, imported characters from *The Sims* and a terrain editor to keep you occupied.

PUB EA DEV Maxis

PCZ ISSUE 125



DUNGEON KEEPER 2

The ultimate 'it's good to be bad' game, *Dungeon Keeper* was a great idea and *DK2* takes the essence and humour of the original, corrects all the mistakes, vastly improves the graphics, and adds a myriad of new features that build wisely on the original concept.

PUB EA DEV Bullfrog

PCZ ISSUE 79

◀ FLIGHT SIMS ▶

IL-2: FORGOTTEN BATTLES



Much of what has been improved with this sequel to *IL-2 Sturmovik* has been done under the virtual bonnet of the game. *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* features improved AI, more accurate flight models and more of a realistic overall experience, plus more campaigns and even more planes. All of this adds up to an exhilarating flying experience. Put simply, we think *IL-2: Forgotten Battles* is one of the finest flight sims ever to grace our screens.

PUB Ubisoft DEV 1C: Madox Games

PCZ ISSUE 128



MS FLIGHT SIM 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

Another dose of sheer authentic aerial quality from the bods at Microsoft, with revamped weather systems, a beefed-up terrain generator and loads of historical planes for you to career around in.

PUB Microsoft DEV Microsoft

PCZ ISSUE 133



BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Allow yourself to be immersed in one of the most exciting and realistic combat flight sims around. The action is non-stop, the skies are crowded and the flight models actually feel 'right'. Tally ho!

PUB Empire Interactive DEV Rowan Software

PCZ ISSUE 103



SECRET WEAPONS OVER NORMANDY

A flight sim with a strong emphasis on fun, rather than flaps, navigation and perfect landings. If you want some intense arcade action with an engaging console-style reward system, look no further.

PUB Activision DEV Lucasarts

PCZ ISSUE 137



LOCK ON: MODERN AIR COMBAT

NEW ENTRY It may not get the heart pounding as much as WWII sims, but *Lock On*, with vast terrain to explore and a huge range of enemies to explode at long-range, is the best (and pretty much only) modern flight-fight game to buy.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Eagle Dynamics

PCZ ISSUE 138

◀ MASSIVELY MULTIPLAYER ▶

EVERQUEST



EverQuest keeps going from strength to strength and now has a total of five expansion packs. One of the best of these, *Planes Of Power*, provides a multitude of simplifications to help newcomers, while adding lots of new worlds for high-level characters to explore. It's a truly beautiful and captivating game that has claimed the souls and social lives of thousands of people the world over.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 117

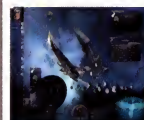


PLANETSIDESIDE

Truly the mother of online battles, *Planetside* is a never-ending war among three armies and waged across several continents. Superb squad battles, stunning vehicles and atmospheric visuals make for a remarkably immersive experience.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Sony Online Entertainment

PCZ ISSUE 131



EVE ONLINE

Eve Online is as beautiful as it is complex, oozing style from every pixel. Choose from four unique races and explore the *Eve* universe with its unparalleled scope for adventure, interaction and trade.

PUB Crucial DEV CCP

PCZ ISSUE 130



ANARCHY ONLINE

A beautiful MMOG with detailed environments and a huge selection of armour and weapons, which all add up to make an immersive title. Many of the bugs have been ironed out and the latest update offers a slick gaming experience.

PUB Funcom DEV Funcom

PCZ ISSUE 114



A TALE IN THE DESERT

No guns, no death, just the peaceful rolling dunes of ancient Egypt. This bizarre, yet beautiful MMOG sees you attempting to build a utopian society, farming camels and progressing through the seven tests of man.

PUB eGenesis DEV eGenesis

PCZ ISSUE 133

MULTIPLAYER MODS ▶

COUNTER-STRIKE (HALF-LIFE)



Despite the troubled single-player release, it seems that *Counter-Strike* will always be the mod that rules the Earth. The popularity of this terrorist versus counter-terrorist mod shows no sign of abating, and there are few PC gamers who don't have a mental map of the troublespots of *de_dust*. At one point there were more CS servers than every other online game put together, and it isn't going to leave us any time soon.

WEB www.counter-strike.net

THE SPECIALISTS

Blending *Half-Life* Team Deathmatch with kung-fu, slo-mo gymnastics make this a must-play mod. With a range of maps and *Matrix*-esque bullet trails, it provides a nice break from the über-realism of *Counter-Strike*.

WEB www.specialistsmod.net

DESERT COMBAT (BF 1942)

This *Battlefield 1942* TC focuses on desert-based conflicts from the last decade, playing through scraps like the original *Desert Storm* and the troubles in Somalia. It's extraordinarily popular, and really rather good.

WEB www.desertcombat.com

NATURAL SELECTION (HALF-LIFE)

This superb *Half-Life* mod sees marines squaring off against the aliens in various sci-fi environments. With the marines working in teams and the aliens acting like mentalists, the variety in gameplay makes this a sure-fire winner.

WEB www.natural-selection.org

DAY OF DEFEAT (HALF-LIFE)

This atmospheric, highly realistic and superbly designed *Half-Life* mod covers various battles from deep within WWII. Its different character classes and superb arsenal of weapons add to authenticity, fun and general carnage.

WEB www.dayofdefeatmod.com

3D ACTION / STRATEGY ▶

OPERATION FLASHPOINT GOLD



Now available with the tricky *Red Hammer* add-on, *Flashpoint* has become to tactical action what *Half-Life* was to shooters. Fight on foot or in tanks, fly planes or even direct an entire platoon, this game is total war – in your face and on a massive scale. The graphics are an acquired taste, but they convey a sense of wide-open warfare perfectly. It's the ultimate military simulation, with a stunning atmosphere and superb missions.

PUB Codemasters DEV Bohemia Interactive

PCZ ISSUE 104

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS 2

With a real Boy's Own feel, a ninja-bastard difficulty rating and the same superb engine as *Mafia*, *H&D 2* is one of the finest squad-based tactical shooters around. It's got a few bugs, but is still an essential purchase.

PUB Gathering DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 136

RAINBOW SIX: RAVEN SHIELD

All the style and presentation you would expect from a Tom Clancy game, from the realism of the weapons down to footprints in the snow. A tactical and atmospheric game that can be frustratingly tricky at times.

PUB Ubisoft DEV Ubisoft Montreal

PCZ ISSUE 127

HIDDEN & DANGEROUS: DELUXE

This revamp of *H&D* removes all of the infamous bugs from the original, as well as including three extra campaigns. There's been a lot of work put in to improving the graphics and modding fans will relish the new editor that ships with this edition.

PUB Take 2 DEV Illusion Softworks

PCZ ISSUE 115

HOSTILE WATERS

A brilliant RTS/action game you can play purely strategically or up close and personal. Inspired by the 16-bit classic *Carrier Command*, it's just a shame there aren't any multiplayer options.

PUB Rage DEV Rage Software

PCZ ISSUE 101

DRIVING GAMES ▶

GRAND THEFT AUTO: VICE CITY



PS2 owners will finally stop gloating when they see *Vice City*'s glorious PC incarnation. *GTA3* was an incredible crim-sim; so incredible that it was hard to see how it could be improved, but the freedom and variety of its follow-up is blinding. Whether it's carrying out its remarkably inventive law-breaking missions or just shooting pedestrians, *Vice City* is about as close to gaming perfection as you can get.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 131

GRAND THEFT AUTO III

It may have been overshadowed by its younger brother, but *Grand Theft Auto III* remains as awesome as it ever was. It's a great spin on both driving and shooting genres and you'll still love its noisy orgy of violence and speed.

PUB Rockstar Games DEV Rockstar North

PCZ ISSUE 117

COLIN MCRÆE 3

Featuring some of the best handling we've ever seen, as well as an excellent new career mode, *Colin McRae 3* is a must-have racer. Driving conditions are realistic, the tracks are varied and the detail overwhelming.

PUB Codemasters DEV Codemasters

PCZ ISSUE 131

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND

Illegal street racing, jazzed-up supercars and such a strong sense of speed that you yelp when you turn corners. *Underground* is a superbly designed and extraordinarily pretty tonic for testosterone-addled speed freaks.

PUB EA DEV Black Box

PCZ ISSUE 137

GRAND PRIX 4

You won't find a more accurate racing sim. Graphically lush and full of anal detail, Geoff Crammond's latest effort offers in-depth telemetry and a staggering number of options. *Grand Prix 4* is leading the grid in the world of racing sims.

PUB Atari DEV Simergy

PCZ ISSUE 119

SPACE COMBAT ▶

X2: THE THREAT



NEW ENTRY Vast, engrossing and utterly compelling. We firmly believe that *X2* is the game that can finally banish the memory of *Elite* to the shadows. The level of detail here is immense, as is the potential. Build your own space empire, form a pirate fleet or just bomb around the Universe like an interstellar playboy. The game could go on forever. And did we mention it's also gobsmackingly beautiful? OK, the story isn't all that, but while nothing's perfect in life, *X2* comes very close.

PUB Deep Silver DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 138

FREELANCER

Freelancer combines the epic open-endedness of *Elite* with the combat immediacy of the *Wing Commander* series. It also mixes in a well played out (if short) story and gorgeous graphics to create a totally engaging experience.

PUB Microsoft DEV Digital Anvil

PCZ ISSUE 128

X - GOLD

The spirit of *Elite* lives on in this massive trading epic, in which you must buy and fight your way back home to Earth. It rewards patience with variety and months of absorbing gameplay. Deeply hypnotic and beautiful rather than tense and frenetic.

PUB THQ DEV Egosoft

PCZ ISSUE 82

TERMINUS

Who says the days of bedroom programming are over? *Terminus* proves you can make a great game on your own if you have the talent and passion, and we reckon it just edges out the mighty *FreeSpace 2*.

PUB www.macgames.co.uk DEV Vicarious Visions

PCZ ISSUE 93

Freespace 2

Following in the footsteps of *Wing Commander* and *X-Wing*, *FreeSpace 2* offers fast-paced dogfighting action all the way. With an epic story and amazing graphics, it suffers from being a bit short-lived if you don't play online.

PUB Interplay DEV Volition Inc

PCZ ISSUE 84

DISC PAGES

DOUBLE-TROUBLE!

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided, which means you get twice as much content as before. If you can't find what you're looking for on the DVD, close the PC ZONE disc browser and turn the disc over.



DISCWORLD

■ WORDS & DISCS Suzy Wallace

▲ Some of you might already have bumped into me on the PC ZONE forums, but after months of kicking the boys' arses, I've finally been given my own column and the chance to introduce myself properly to the adoring ZONE faithful.

My reason for living is to make sure you get to play the biggest and best demos before anyone else and, despite the fact that the Christmas rush has been and gone, this month's discs are packed with three massive exclusives, including the utterly fantastic and tropical *Far Cry*. At over 500MB, it's a gargantuan affair that drops you onto your very own tropical island, and gives you the chance to soak up a bit of sun while playing merry hell with a bunch of rock-hard mercenaries.

If you're feeling the need to slim down after an excessive Christmas or New Year binge, boot-up the exclusive *Prince Of Persia* demo and somersault and slash your way to a new slimmer you. And then there's X2, a newly installed Classic (92%, issue 138) that lets you control the spaceways and provides enough depth to keep you going until the summer.

If that's not enough, there are loads of other demos, movies, mods and full online games to tackle – you'll find everything else listed on the following four pages. If you've got any suggestions, kind or otherwise, let me know by emailing letters@pczone.co.uk – or by posting on the PC ZONE forums at www.pczone.co.uk

Until next month...

FAR CRY

CD1/DVD Pub: Ubisoft Dev: Crytek

Every now and then a demo appears that's so vast, wide-ranging and just so goddamn gob-smacking that it demands copious joyful replays. Now *Far Cry* has joined the hall of fame, and if you fail to coo and paw at the screen then you can no longer be considered a human being.

Beautiful isn't it? And bloody hard as well. Your mission is to traverse sand banks and beaches, sneak through jungles, fight your way through abandoned forts and destroy the satellite dish at the top of the island's mountain. In your way are a crack team of mercenaries who may spend their time chatting about fishing, but as soon as they see or hear you (or see a flare sent up by one of their compatriots), some mightily impressive AI kicks in. Should you make your presence known, they'll be hiding, scattering and hunting you down like the dog you are in no time.

Stealth is the order of the day, but there'll still be plenty of bloody combat before bedtime too. The opposing grunts have choppers, rocket launchers, mini-gun emplacements, snipers and rocket-toting patrol boats at their disposal and will not make your journey an easy one. Our tips? Nab the patrol boat at the start for a bit of bonus firepower, and bear in mind that on a neighbouring beach there's a handy four-wheeler/machine-gun combo that makes short work of the trek up the hill. Unless you opt for a more *Rambo: First Blood* approach in foliage, of course. The choice, as they say, is yours...



Beach party, *Far Cry*-style.



WALKTHROUGH →

HARD AS NAILS... Take on *Far Cry* as you would a bog-standard FPS and you'll be dead in minutes. Here's a spot of help...



1 A picturesque island: quiet, peaceful, serene. That is until the mercenaries wake up and fill the air with blood and bullets. You've only got a lousy pistol, so perhaps a subtle approach is required here. How about crawling underneath those rickety boards?



2 Hah! The stupid mercenaries are unaware that, while they swap notes on fishing, the bringer of their doom is mere inches below their feet. Pop a cap in their heads (if you want), but our advice is to sneak a bit further for some more explosive firepower.



3 A patrol boat equipped with machine gun and rocket launcher floats idly by the jetty. Bearing in mind that there's a wary grunt on the platform above you, swim over to it and nick it. Take it into the bay, work out the gun controls and prepare to unleash hell.



4 Ha! Take that you evil swines! All the mercenaries are very much aware of your presence, and a patrol boat will just have been launched from the beach to stop your meddling. But until then, you can happily rain down fiery hell on your foes.

HELP!

CD trouble? Don't worry – phone our helpline on 08700 711482. The line is open weekdays between 9.30am and 5pm, and Saturday from 10am to 2pm, or email pc_zone@interchange.co.uk.

BEFORE YOU DIAL...

If you're calling the helpline:

- If possible, have your PC operating and near the phone when you call.
- If this is not possible, note down all relevant

information – ie system type, soundcard, RAM and so on, along with the nature of the fault.

- Have a pen and paper to hand so you can jot down the relevant info.

MINIMUM SPECIFICATION

- To run the software on these discs, you need at least a PIII 1GHz or equivalent, with a GeForce 3 64MB graphics card and 256MB RAM (512MB recommended for Windows XP users).

DISCLAIMER

- This disc has been thoroughly tested at all stages of its production. However, it's always wise to use a virus checker on any software before running it.

- Dennis Publishing Limited cannot accept responsibility for any loss, disruption or damage to your data or your computer system (including hardware) that may occur while using either the disc or programs and data on it.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

CD2/DVD Pub: Ubisoft **Dev:** Ubisoft Montreal **Reviewed:** Issue 136, 84%

Herein lies a tragedy. When we first saw the new *Prince Of Persia* game we were stunned – it's quite probably the best-looking and playable platformer ever to grace the PC. The trouble is, the PC looks on platformers like Clare Short would on the latest Pirelli calendar.

Luckily, this demo gives you the chance to see why we were (and still are) excited and aroused. The game is centred

around the titular *Sands Of Time*, which were spilled early on in the game proper, causing almost everyone in the land to transmogrify into strange beasts. To counter these and the many traps and death-defying leaps, you need to get your hands on the magic dagger (the one that's imbued with time-control powers, enabling you to literally rewind time if you fluff something). Each bit of time-

control uses up a portion of the sands within the dagger, but you can top this up by dispatching the enemy (and your own health by drinking water).

The demo starts by presenting you with a few trap-filled corridors before you enter the main hall, where tumbling ledges, massive pillars and a giant statue stand between you and your prize. Once you've retrieved the dagger, you need to

get your arse out quick-smart as the corridors start to crumble.

Now it's time to fight. Use the blocking stance to deflect all but the most sneaky of attacks. Running toward an enemy while pressing jump enables you to lightly vault over their heads, giving you a chance to get out of a tight scrape and also lets you get a swift thwack to the back. Remember to finish off defeated enemies with your

dagger or they'll rise again to seek their revenge.

Next up is a section showing off the acrobatic highlights of the game, in which you find yourself running along walls, swinging from poles and generally jumping about like a demented flea. This is followed by the grand finale, in which you and the Maharajah's daughter/token love interest, Farah, battle it out with more gruesome enemies.



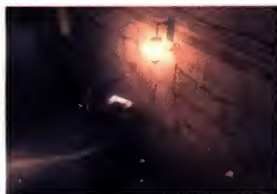
"Fancy a threesome, girls?"



The locals are particularly friendly.

TRAVEL IN STYLE

THE PRINCE SHOWS THAT RUGS AREN'T THE ONLY PERSIAN SPECIALITY



A) Run along walls
Run beside a wall and press and hold the special action – this is great for traversing areas with no floor. Just remember that you need something concrete to hold on to.



B) Run up walls
Run towards a wall holding the special action. Handy for getting that extra bit of height when grabbing for a branch or pole. And we've always wanted to have the power to do this.



C) Swing on poles
Hold special action to rotate, and jump to jump off. Can't see a way to get up the walls? Keep an eye out for any flagpoles, branches or anything else that you can swing from!

X2: THE THREAT

CD2/DVD Pub: Deep Silver **Dev:** Egosoft **Reviewed:** Issue 138, 92%

Beautiful, engrossing and ridiculously detailed; if you give *X2: The Threat* enough of your time, you'll undoubtedly reap its rewards. This demo undeniably takes a while to get your head round, but once you get the keyboard commands lodged into your short-term memory, the game flows beneath your fingertips.

This demo gives you full access to *X2*'s many and various tutorials, enabling you to trade and explore, as well as lock missiles onto your enemy, blast him out of the sky and steal all his cargo. After the obligatory intro movie, you'll find yourself learning how to manoeuvre your craft, trade with space stations,

find local bargains on military hardware and navigate yourself around the map. It can get intimidating – most of the buttons on your keyboard seem to have some use or other – but a friendly training computer is on hand to guide you through it all. What's more, if you pay attention you'll be an interstellar wheeler-dealer in no time at all.

Further tutorials instruct you on how to build your own factories, but most exciting is the one that gives you the chance to sit at the bridge of a huge command ship and defend it from an oncoming fleet using your turrets and remote-controlled Argon fighters. After this, there's a corner of the *X2*

universe open for your exploration; from then on, whether you want to be a capitalist bastard factory owner or a nefarious pirate (or a mixture of the two) is pretty much up to you. Happy trails!



X2 features some beautiful and mesmerising interstellar scenery.



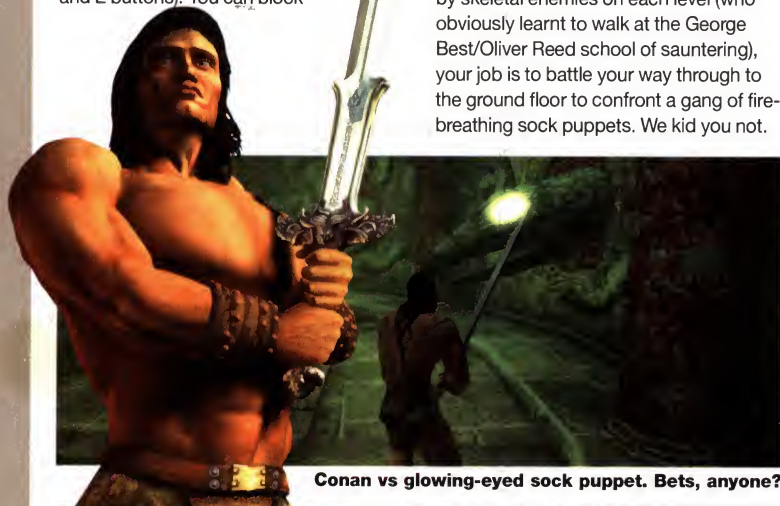
CONAN

CD2/DVD Pub: TDK Dev: Cauldron

The broad-shouldered barbarian ain't renowned for his huge lobes, relying instead on rippling muscles and a giant blade to spill the blood of a thousand adversaries. The developer of this game has tried to add a bit of variety by giving you several different attacks, brought about by a combination of mouse (left or right click) and keyboard mashing (Q and E buttons). You can block

using the spacebar, while the left ALT button provides a way of interacting with nearby objects and doubles as your jump.

Starting off under the cover of night (as if Conan can sneak!), you need to make your way through town, slaughtering guards, climbing moss (as you do), mounting rooftops and running like the wind towards the snake tower. Guarded by skeletal enemies on each level (who obviously learnt to walk at the George Best/Oliver Reed school of sauntering), your job is to battle your way through to the ground floor to confront a gang of fire-breathing sock puppets. We kid you not.



Conan vs glowing-eyed sock puppet. Bets, anyone?

TIME OF DEFIANCE

CD1/DVD Pub: Oxygen Interactive Dev: NiCE

Reviewed: Issue 137, 66%

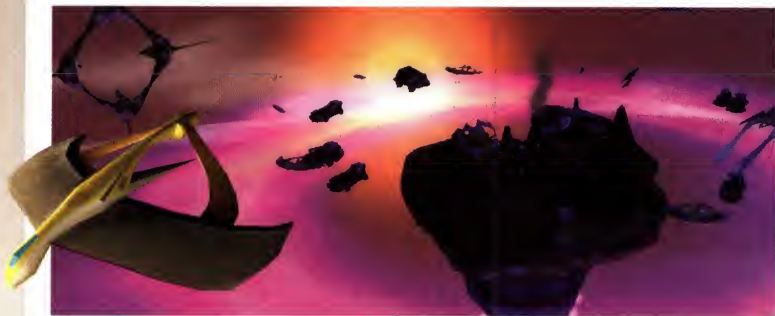
Space: being the final frontier as it is, it's just crying out for someone to come along, colonise it and set up a McDonald's. And who better than you? *Time Of Defiance* is the game that lets you become a capitalist-pig-dog-in-space, but before you hop online for your free three days (try repeating that at speed after a few pints), you'll need to register to receive your server details.

You start on your own island in space, with a few buildings and a small fleet of ships. Resources are mined from the islands in your control, so both colonising and managing to keep hold of other islands is essential. Use your scout ships

to find other islands, and if unclaimed, scan them for mineral content. If it's good, set up shop and make sure to defend it with turrets. If the island is populated, you can declare intergalactic warfare with the fleet of gunships available to build.

Warfare is simple and you needn't worry about dying either as you get to re-start for as long as the game lasts. However, before you declare war, remember that your neighbour (even if they are 60-million light years away) who you bombed the crap out of just for the hell of it will remember you too – and is most likely planning revenge right now.

FULL
ONLINE
GAME



"I think I can see the pub from here..."



Cabbies always know a good short cut.

CRAZY TAXI 3

CD1/DVD Pub: Empire Dev: Sega/Strangelite Rev: Issue 139, 65%

A taxi driver slides sideways towards a pedestrian, who hops gingerly out of the way before literally vaulting into the cab. Doesn't sound much like real life, does it? But then, this is *Crazy Taxi 3*.

In this world, passengers pay extra for close misses, drifting round corners and tyre-scorching wheelspins. There's one full course available in this demo – the Glitter Oasis – but you can choose from a selection of four cars that come complete with their respective drivers. Whether you plump for Angel and his tiger-stripe seats or Mrs Venus and her monster of a cab, you can be assured that the three minutes

you get behind the wheel will be busy.

The rules are simple: stop in the circle around certain pedestrians to pick them up and use the arrow for directions. Drop them off in the marked areas and they'll pay you accordingly. New to the third outing is the ability to take group cab fares of up to four people, with each passenger wanting to be dropped off at a different location. Plus, remember you can earn bonuses by driving like a maniac, so use your Crazy Dashes (switch quickly from reverse to drive and accelerate) and Crazy Drifts (hold down the reverse and drive buttons while turning) liberally.



Just sitting on the dock of the bay, watching the tide roll away...

BIOSFEAR CLIENT

CD2/DVD Pub: Tiscali Dev: Nako Interactive

Korea may be famous for being one of the only countries in the world to openly parade their nuclear weapons about without fear of being invaded by American armed forces (well, North Korea anyway), but they also happen to make bloody good MMORPGs. *BiosFear* is the most popular in the country, with player figures of over half-a-million.

Once you've registered online, you can create your character from one of four races: Bulkan (a powerful melee character), Human (high technology

characters), Kailipton (attacks are based on magic power) or Aidia (defensive magic character) – and a multitude of hairstyles.

Play is extremely easy to pick up – much different from its *EverQuest* counterpart, which can require long waits online just to find a group. Just wander outside the walls of the city and start fighting the creatures that roam the wilderness there.

FULL
ONLINE
GAME

PLUS: PLAYABLE DEMOS OF THIEF AND GENEWAR, AND MODS & ADD-ONS FOR OPERATION FLASHPOINT

DVD EXCLUSIVES

ONLY AVAILABLE ON PC ZONE'S DVD EDITION. TO SUBSCRIBE, TURN TO PAGE 114. FOR FULL CONTENTS, SEE BACK OF THE BOX

THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

The PC ZONE DVD is now double-sided. On one you've got all the new content, but flip it over and you'll find the Essential Selection, the best demos and mods the world has ever created, along with all the patches, drivers and all the utilities you need to make your PC a shrine of gaming goodness.

SPELLFORCE

DVD Pub: Bigben Dev: Phenomic

Reviewed: Issue 137, 79%



Take control of a woman and kick some arse!

Spellforce provides an intriguing combination of RTS and RPG elements, with the normally tedious resource-collecting element of an RTS replaced with the ability to develop your character's skills. This demo teaches you

the basics, with a tutorial level and a full single-player and multiplayer map to test out your prowess for real. The engine is also pretty nifty, enabling you to go from isometric views to first-person in a flick of the mouse wheel.

LIVE FOR SPEED

DVD Pub: N/A Dev: N/A Website: www.liveforspeed.net

A fantastic racing demo with one track, playable as normal or in reverse, in a choice of racing or rallycross modes.



Doug hated being beaten from the lights.

The controls feel really weird at first (the mouse controls your steering, left mouse button is accelerate, right is brake) but after a lap or two, you get used to it and from then on, the controls feel strangely comfortable.

Although the racing mode is good fun, we much prefer the rallycross races: the combination of off-roading and track feels just right and the mouse handles opposite lock surprisingly well.

One complaint, though – we liked the rally section so much, we were disappointed there wasn't a separate section for this. But this has still become our definitive tea-break driving game.



Locals in the village can help you with supplies, from food to weapons.

ANITO

DVD Pub: N/A Dev: Anino Entertainment

Website: www.aninoentertainment.com

Following in the footsteps of our indie developers feature (issue 137) is *Anito*, which has been lovingly produced by an independent Philippino games developer. It's a half-decent RPG and this demo offers a good few hours of play. When starting off, it's best to accept help and

learn how to control your character, as some controls may seem a little strange. After you've finished training, your base is the local town, where, as well as being the local noble's son, you're moonlighting with the town's beautiful female Kapitán – some people have it all!

WWII: PACIFIC HEROES

DVD Pub: City Interactive

Dev: City Interactive

Help the hapless Americans fight off the might of the Japanese Naval and Air Forces over two missions. The first sees you tasked with removing the incoming naval and air threat in your plane. Head NNE to find your first flotilla of ships to gun down, complete with their own air support squadron. The second mission puts you in charge of your head ship's anti-aircraft guns, with a host of incoming flying Japanese (thankfully not Kamikaze) pilots to keep you on your toes.



The DIY firework display was somewhat lacking.

DVD-VIDEO



There's games-footage galore on this issue's DVD-video, including action from *UT2004*, *Doom 3*, *Breed* and *Battlefield Vietnam*, brought to you courtesy of NVIDIA and its recent Editor's Day in San Francisco. (Editor's Day? And where was my bloody invitation! – Ed). Plus, you can also feast your eyes on the trailer from the forthcoming *kill.switch*. So why not kick off your shoes, make yourself a cuppa and plonk the DVD (side 1 facing upwards) into your DVD player (or DVD software on your PC). It's as easy as that.

ALSO ON THE DVD... ALL THE PATCHES YOU'LL EVER NEED, PLUS THE LATEST VERSIONS OF *DESERT COMBAT* AND *AMERICA'S ARMY*, THE NEWEST MOVIES AND THE BEST CONTENT FROM THIS MONTH'S COMMUNITY CHEST (SEE PAGE 112). YOU CAN ALSO FIND ALL THE MODS WE'VE REVIEWED THIS MONTH, ALONG WITH A *THIEF* DEMO (THE STAR OF THIS MONTH'S 'GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD', P138), AND THIS MONTH'S FREE PLAY GAME (P15).



GAMES THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

THIEF: THE DARK PROJECT

Rhianna Pratchett looks back to the days when the stealth costume of choice was a big hood and the only gadgets you needed were moss arrows and breath potions



The undead: every burglar's worst nightmare.



Despite the developers' best intentions, one or two fantasy clichés slipped through.



Sword.

You're a mugger not a fighter: combat was always a last resort.



GAME Thief: The Dark Project
DEVELOPER Looking Glass Studios
PUBLISHER Eidos Interactive
RELEASED December 1998
INFLUENCED Although it wasn't the first game to include stealth elements, *Thief: The Dark Project* really kick-started the idea of a truly sophisticated stealth system, one that embodied everything from weapons and gadgets to visibility and sound, all within a realistic 3D environment. Consequently, the influence of the *Thief* games can be felt in practically every stealth title released since, particularly *Deus Ex*, the *Hitman* games and *Splinter Cell*.

EVERYONE loves an anti-hero. You know, that particular man or woman who gets embroiled in some ridiculous plot to save the world from evil when they'd obviously rather be looking after number one. Their appeal comes from the fact that they're much more like us than any gung-ho, khaki-covered jock with a big gun and a bad attitude – we can relate to them. And one of the greatest anti-heroes in gaming history has got to be Garrett from the pioneering stealth masterpiece, *Thief: The Dark Project*.

A man of dubious morals and a decidedly dodgy reputation, Garrett is purely out for a quick buck, and doesn't mind knocking off a few henchmen to get his way. He's a sneaky, devious, underhanded bastard, and it's this character that helped make *Thief* one of the most compelling and immersive stealth games of all time.

"We wanted a tough, mysterious, jaded anti-hero, someone who was in keeping with our desire to avoid the standard hero clichés associated with the fantasy game genre," agrees the project leader on *Thief*, Greg LoPiccolo. Defining the exact tone and character of the game's lead figure became an important part of the development process and one that Randy Smith was quizzed on when

PROFILE

Three key members of the original *Thief* team were Randy Smith, Doug Church and Greg LoPiccolo. Each was present at different stages of the development cycle, and Randy is current project director on the next *Thief* game.



NAME Randy Smith
ROLE ON THIEF Designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Randy is project director on *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, shaping up at Ion Storm.



NAME Greg LoPiccolo
ROLE ON THIEF Project leader
WHERE IS HE NOW? Greg now resides at Harmonix Music Systems, where he's vice-president of product development. Previous games from Harmonix include *Frequency*, *Amplitude* and *Karaoke Revolution*.



NAME Doug Church
ROLE ON THIEF Programmer/designer
WHERE IS HE NOW? Doug has risen to the lofty position of technical director at Eidos, where he oversees many titles, as well as pitching in with Greg on the Harmonix Music project.

he joined the *Thief* team as designer in 1997. Randy also voiced the character of Murus in the game, fact fans, and is now project director on the third *Thief* game.

"Garrett's original name was Palmer, and he started as a simple paragraph description about a world-weary master thief who's just trying to get by, but whose fate is intertwined with the Keeper prophecies," explains Randy. "Later, a bunch of us were working on briefings and his personality started to emerge out of the voice we were writing in. Eventually, we really worked out the subtle nuances about what really motivates him, what he's conflicted about, what he lies to himself about and how his character develops over time."

ARTHURIAN ZOMBIE COMMY-SLASHER

But before Garrett had been conceived, deciding on the exact nature of the game was no easy task for the Looking Glass studio. The studio had already shipped *Ultima Underworld 1 & 2* and *System*

Shock, and knew it wanted to create an immersive first-person experience.

However, before the team settled on the title of *Thief*, the original game concept

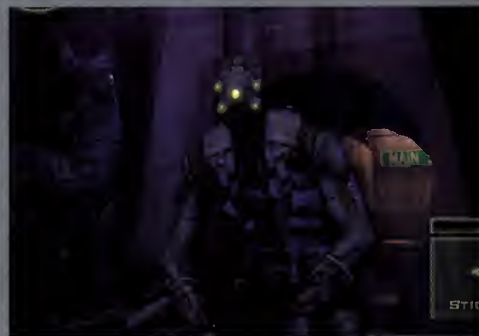
SNEAKING INTO THE FUTURE

IS INVISIBLE THE NEW BLACK, OR WILL STEALTH ACTION FADE AS QUICKLY AS IT CAME?

With three major stealth franchises competing for attention in the next few months, it looks like being a good year for hidden assassins. Added to that is the regular inclusion of stealth elements within FPS and RPG games, a trend which has grown since the original *Thief*.

"I think most stealth games are still puzzle games in many ways, with preconceived notions of how to solve them and what path to take," says Doug Church, speaking on the current state of the genre. "Often, you end up playing the AI as much as the world, using the radar not the 3D."

Doug reckons that making the world richer and more immersive for the player is the way forward. "I hope we'll see them advance to give players more control and real choice, not just branches and puzzles. There are so many opportunities to let players be clever and cunning. So I hope at least some games get less arcade-like and more environment-focused, with the spotlight on empowering players."



Sam Fisher slinks back for *Pandora Tomorrow*.

went through a number of mutations. First, it was to be a sword fighting game called 'Dark Camelot' (where Mordred instead of King Arthur was the protagonist). There was also what Randy describes as a "satirical shooter" called 'Better Red Than Undead', which involved killing zombies and/or communists. One of the other initial ideas for the game was called 'The Dark Project', a simpler version of what was to become *Thief*.

Although elements of all these original ideas did make their way into the final game (sword fighting and zombies), it was clear that whatever Looking Glass decided to embark on, it would have to show off the dark and moody rendering engine the studio was developing at the time to best effect.

"It was a great engine with which to build a game like *Thief*, where shadows

are so important and the player can control the lighting. I think that it played a big role in the 'thief' idea getting chosen," says Randy. "Essentially, 'The Dark Project' concept was focused down to a single, simple high concept: you are a stealthy master thief in a medieval city, and the equally simple name *Thief* was chosen to support the clarity of that vision."

TEETHING TROUBLES

The developers certainly had more than their fair share of problems bringing *Thief* together, getting through three project leaders, three lead designers and two lead programmers in the game's two-and-a-half-year development cycle. Added to that was the fact that the AI had to be scrapped and rewritten from scratch in the last few months of the project.

"The last six months of development was a total death march of 14-hour days and seven-day weeks," recalls Greg. "I'm incredibly proud of the game, but I hope to never repeat the experience!"

But, as is so often the case with innovative titles, one of the main problems surrounding the development

of *Thief* was a lack of belief, particularly about the potential for a stealth-based first-person game.

Long-time programmer and designer at Looking Glass, Doug Church explains: "Even internally, we weren't sure how well it would work – and our publisher definitely wasn't sold on it. This caused a lot of inefficiency and stress, as we ended up doing lots of 'prove it' demos, adding non-stealth aspects to hedge our bets, or having to explain again what was going to be fun about it."

"I'm not exactly sure how it all came together at the end," agrees Randy. "It was a matter of faith, visualisation and aggressive tuning of the most important parameters. But then one day everyone just got it, and from our own Q&A people to the execs at Eidos, we were getting compliments on what a fun, interesting and fresh game we had on our hands."

CITYSCAPE

The core belief behind creating the *Thief* world was to break out of what Greg describes as the "elves-and-goblins aesthetic ghetto", which was the perceived view of fantasy games at the time. From that belief, a highly distinctive artistic vision began to emerge, taking its influence as much from films like *City of Lost*

"I'm not sure how it came together – faith, visualisation and hard tuning of parameters"

RANDY SMITH
DESIGNER



Holy water was one of the few ways of wiping out the undead.



Guards would come and search if they glimpsed you in the shadows.

Children and early industrial factories as from traditional medieval settings. The result was a sprawling steam-era world, mixed with medieval and magical environments, which set the scene for a different type of fantasy game.

The new engine technology enabled very elaborate backdrops within the game, complete with their own beautiful period details, textures and lighting. To further emphasise the dark, moody environments, *Thief* introduced a now widely emulated light-gauge device, which showed how well Garrett was hidden in the shadows. Though the technology at the time made this a slightly fudged solution, the light gauge eventually proved a far more elegant device than, say, the vision cones of *Metal Gear Solid*.

The levels also offered a beautiful impression of freedom, giving you the feeling that you could go anywhere your feet and a well-launched rope arrow could take you – even in reality, the missions were fairly linear. The AI of the NPCs, which had incremental sensitivity levels to noise and visual alarms, completed the sense of realism and unyielding tension.

As a consequence, both *Thief* and its sequel, *The Metal Age*, have proved hugely popular with the modding community. Some great fan missions like *The Seventh Crystal* and the upcoming *T2X: Shadows Of The Metal Age* have been created using the versatile DromEd *Thief* level-builder, keeping the series highly buoyant online.

"The best of the *Thief* mods are really impressive and very gratifying to me personally," says Greg. "I was really surprised at how many fans really bought into the overall fictional world that we created in *Thief*. The sophistication of the mods is a testament to how good and flexible the Dark Engine scripting system and object system were, not to mention the creativity of the fans."

THE SECOND COMING

But although *Thief* performed well and received some rapturous reviews, Randy claims that players didn't really warm to some of the horror and combat elements in the game: "They found it a little schizophrenic." As a result, the crypts full of lurking zombies and

the more magical elements of the game were sent packing in *Thief II: The Metal Age*. Instead, the sequel opted for steam-powered robots that chugged up and down corridors with sad, cranky voices and could be incapacitated with a well-placed water arrow. Fortunately, they've been dropped for the third game.

The levels also became more domestic, with far more of the game based on creeping around large buildings and city streets. This enabled the team to concentrate more heavily on the stealth aspects of *Thief* and dull down the combat, which became very much a last resort for the player.

For Randy, the new focus of *Thief II* was very much a double-edged sword: "In some ways, the new angle was really successful, but in other ways we took it a bit too far and for many players the game lost some of its lustre, depth and unpredictability."

STEALTHY LEGACY

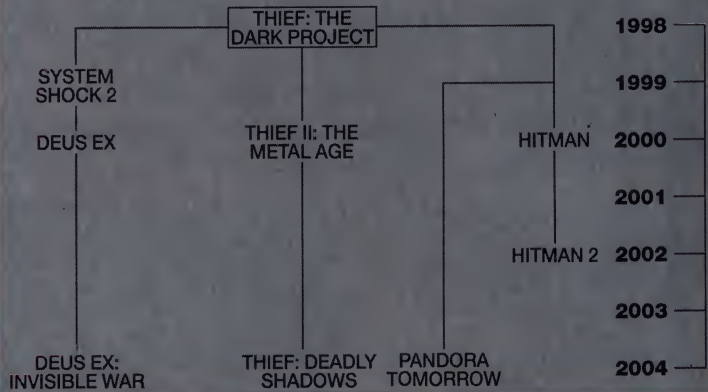
Needless to say, fans of the series are hugely excited about the prospect of a third *Thief* episode. Though Looking Glass Studios is long since defunct, several of the original team have been gathered together at Ion Storm, under the watchful eye of Warren 'Deus Ex' Spector.

The new game, *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, was put on the back burner while *Deus Ex: Invisible War* was completed, but the team at Ion Storm is now working day and night to get it finished. What we've seen so far is very promising, and suggests the developers have stuck to what made the original so great, focusing on creating an immersive, interactive world, with the focus on softly, softly, rather than wading in with a big sword. (We're off to Ion Storm to play the game next issue, so stay tuned for a full preview soon.)

But regardless of the success or otherwise of the new sequel, it's the original game that will always be remembered as the pioneering classic, the one that proved the viability of an entirely new style of

FAMILY TREE

Most self-respecting stealth games these days have a few silent homages to the pure stealth mechanics of *Thief*. Here are a few of the most notable.



gameplay. In the words of designer Randy Smith: "It's really flattering when we see games that have stealth models that are clearly based on *Thief*. Many games have stealth elements these days, but *Thief* seems to have defined a point on one side of the spectrum. If you want to make a comprehensible game that's truly first and foremost about stealth, you need to look to *Thief* as your starting point." [E]



THE LIONHEAD DIARIES

It's our cover story, and here we continue the epic saga of the making of *Black & White 2*. This month, **John McLean-Foreman** takes you into the uncharted territory of the third dimension...



ONE of the most difficult things that I've come up against in writing these *Black & White 2* Diaries is talking about programming.

Programming. Is. Dull. It's naught but numbers (sorry, programming joke there).

If I show you some code, you'll see zeros and ones, or mad text strings in some kind of bizarre, almost-English language. 3D programming is even more unreadable and even more mathematical. Frankly, I don't remember anyone ever getting excited about reading maths textbooks, do you?

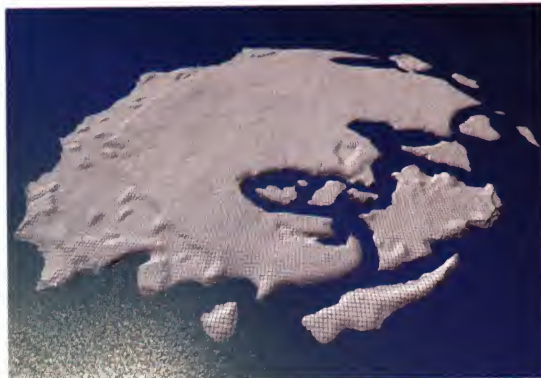
The bottom line is this: games have a 3D engine, and that's the code that comes together to power all the visuals in the game. The Creature, the landscape, the objects – everything that moves and everything that's been drawn by the artists is rendered by the graphics card hidden away in the bowels of your PC, and that card is, in turn, instructed by the 3D programming code. That's what programming is: instructions on what to do, or in this case, what to draw.

3D WOW!

So, what are the 3D programmers of *Black & White 2* up against? The game needs to be able to simultaneously render thousands of people, as well as evolving towns and varying weather conditions. It must also render different climates from around the world, as well as landscapes that morph based on player alignment, not to mention dynamic landscapes that can be torn asunder by godly might.

Further, when you play some games, you may notice that the camera is usually set at a fixed distance, which means the artwork only needs to be created to reflect that single distance. In *B&W2* however, the 3D engine has to look just as good on the ground amid the buzzing insects as it does overlooking the entire landscape from up in the clouds – as well as from every point in-between. No small feat.

Given the ambition of the game, I originally had serious doubts that it would



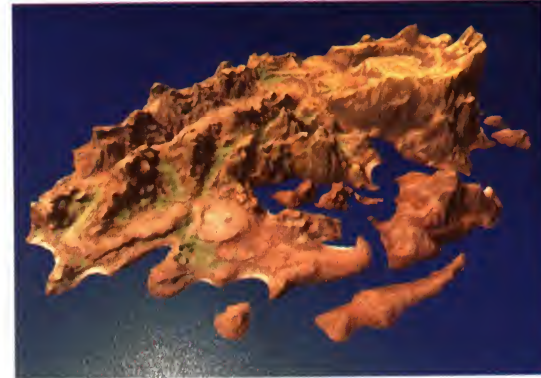
Each island in *Black & White 2* starts off like this...



...and then the 3D wizards get to work.



Terrain is dropped in and texture added...



...until it eventually ends up looking like this.

be able to run on a four-year-old machine (*B&W 1*'s recommended system is the target for *B&W 2*'s minimum requirements).

I asked Jonty (head of B&W Studios) how he planned to accomplish this, and he explained that all he had to do was tell David, our 3D engine guru, that he'd never be able to do it so he might as well not bother. David, as is his way, was totally offended and set about proving Jonty wrong.

David says there are several things to keep in mind when designing a 3D engine – but first and foremost, you program everything with the minimum spec machine in mind. Once you get

all the base features of the game running at a good frame rate, then you have a very efficient and scaleable 3D engine to run on the high-spec machines. With the amount of processing power left over, we can go mad with visual extras and use the hardware to its full potential.

ALL TOOLED UP

Another aspect I'd never have thought of but have learned is vitally important is the design of the art tools. As David puts it, you can have a great 3D engine, but if you have crap artwork or no way to properly transfer beautiful artwork into the game, the final product will be poor.

With this in mind, he and the 3D team worked hard to create a toolset that's easy to use and allows artists the flexibility to be inventive within their area of expertise.

Francesco, for example, is most definitely not an artist. He

is, however, a gifted mathematician and programmer, and as such he was able to create what seemed to me to be some ultra-realistic water. Once Alberto (one of our artists) got his hands on Francesco's work, though, he created water that was so beautiful, it looked like he'd used a completely different water system altogether. That, of course, was only possible because a lot of thought went into creating effective art tools.

BOFFINS FROM NASA

Obviously, there's a lot more to a creating a 3D engine than all this – the 3D team explained their mountain of work to me in as simple a way as possible, and I couldn't help but be impressed and mildly confused by the complexity of it all.

It would be unfair of me not to mention the passion that the 3D team has for innovation and realising Peter Molyneux's design ambitions, because ultimately it's that passion that converts into what you see on screen. In the end, it doesn't matter how great the technology is: if the game runs too slowly, or you fail in making it look beautiful, then it's all been a waste of time – and time is something we're not prepared to waste. **EW**

"You can have a great 3D engine, but if you have crap artwork or no way to transfer beautiful artwork into the game, the final result will be poor"

JOHN MCLEAN-FOREMAN FICTION WRITER, LIONHEAD



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THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

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We steal an exclusive look at the spine-tingling new stealth sequel

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Your bodily fluids are lost somewhere in there.

CAPTAIN BLOOD

Or, how I learnt to stop worrying and recover bodily fluids

FROM THE land of the onion-wearing cyclist came some inane Gallic inventiveness in the guise of *Captain Blood*. The game had nothing to do with the classic Errol Flynn swashbuckler, or indeed the less than classic pulp sci-fi novel from Captain Kirk, but was instead possibly one of the most unusual games ever conceived.

In a storyline that melded *Tron* with *Dr Strangelove*, you played a computer game programmer

cloned and trapped in his own creation. The aim, of course, was to escape this silicon nightmare, but not before apprehending your five duplicates, each of which was in possession of an unspecified quantity of your bodily liquids.

Instead of providing the basis of what would probably have been an atrocious vial-collecting platformer, *Cap'n Blood* turned out to be a captivating sci-fi adventure set across a galaxy of over 32,000 planets. Much of the

gameplay involved finding a planet and navigating something called an Oorxx down impressive fractal-generated caverns, before interrogating the resident alien. Using bribes, threats or warped logic, the alien might then reveal a clue located on another planet and the cycle continued until the threat abated.

The puzzles were generally obtuse, the icon system unwieldy and progress could be both slow and utterly boring. However, like even the most mediocre mystery, a clue would reawaken interest. Plus, aided by one of the first professional soundtracks (by Jean Michel Jarre, no less) and some conceptual graphics, *Captain Blood* quickly passed into the realm of the cult classic. Unlike the FMV-laden sequel, which was crap.

**RETRO
ZONE
JUNE
1988**

Tiffany and Belinda were battling in the charts, but *Richie Shoemaker* was battling with blood, boobs and mindbending aliens. Somebody had to...

"Captain Blood was a captivating sci-fi adventure set across a galaxy of over 32,000 planets"

THE BEST OF THE REST



SPY VS SPY (NES)

Already four years old and the first ever deathmatch game – based on *MAD* comic characters – *Spy Vs Spy* finally made it from home computer to console. The aim was to escape a building after locating secret documents, but in fact most people waited for the other player to find the items before snaring them with all sorts of booby traps. Great stuff.



POGOSTICK OLYMPICS (Spectrum/C64/Amstrad)

With the resurgence of the scooter and perennial 1950s favourite the whip-and-top (Beyblade I think they call it these days), it's only a matter of time before pogging makes a comeback. And when it does, this £1.99 cheapie will be seen as a post-modern retro classic. At the time it was utter muck, of course: 110m pogo hurdles? As if.



ZAK MCKRACKEN & THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS (Atari ST/PC/Amiga)

An early LucasArts point-and-click adventure, *Zak* was notable for its size and scope in that the gameworld was vast and the scope for object and character interaction bordered on the ridiculous. Sadly, despite the involvement of *Monkey Island* creator Ron Gilbert, the humour was rather wide of the mark.



VIXEN (Spectrum/PC/C64/Amstrad)

It was rather tricky to turn inch-high sprites into figures of lust, so instead the publishers employed glamour models on their covers to attract gamers. It worked for *Barbarian* and *Maria Whitaker*; but *Vixen*, despite being a decent hack'n'slash adventure, was promoted by Corrine Russell. And although she had the physique, she was no bubbly Sam Fox.

NEWSFLASH

IT'S JUNE 1988 AND...

- *Impossible Mission* is released for the Atari 7800 console. Ironically, a fatal bug in the US version of the game means it cannot be completed.
- Nintendo is reported to have signed an agreement with Sony to develop a CD-ROM drive for the Super Nintendo Entertainment System.
- Clive Sinclair is back in the news with his Z88 computer. It was either a glorified word-processor or the world's first laptop, depending on who you ask.

In the offices of LucasArts

George (on phone, angry):

What the heck is going on down there? You do realise we're mere months away from the first living Ewok foetus, don't you? And this genetic splicing stuff isn't cheap, you bunch of half-witted nerf-herders! We need more friggin' *Star Wars* games! *hangs up*

LucasArts employee 1: Shit.

What are we going to do? We used up all our best ideas years ago. Is there any genre we haven't, er, 'paid homage to' yet?

LucasArts employee 2: Umm...

FPS? Shit. RTS? Dammit. MMORPG? Wookiee tits. We've done the lot.

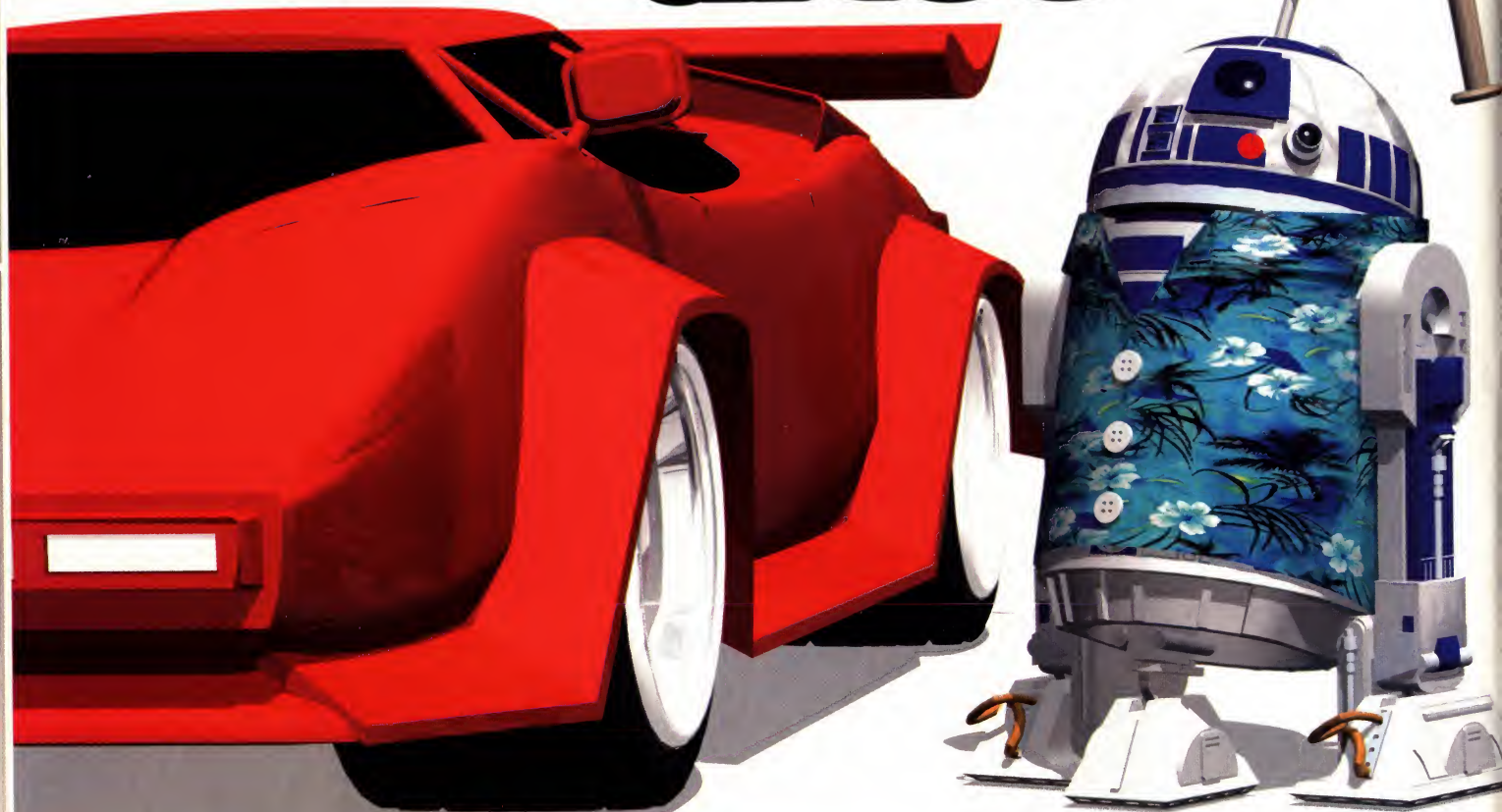
LucasArts employee 1: What about that new genre, that *Battletoad 1942* thing?

LucasArts employee 2: Too late, we're on it already. Haven't you heard about *Star Wars Battlefront*...?

LucasArts employee 1: Bugger.

LucasArts employee 2: Wait! I've got it...

grand theft artoo



Also coming soon...

Moisture Farmer Season 03/04, The Siths: Livin' It Up, Leia 3D: Sexy Empire and Metal Gear Solo

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